



# THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CHRIST THE KING

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## 28th June 2020

# SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

## Secondary Patrons of the Diocese



### YEAR OF COMMUNION

This weekend, had it not been for Covid-19, many of us would have been gathering at St. Brendan's in Bristol, for our annual diocesan day. It is always a joyful occasion when we celebrate who we are as a community of parishes far and wide. A striking aspect of the day is the diversity of people who come as individuals but with a common purpose. Saints Peter and Paul, whose feast we celebrate today, couldn't have been more different, but they were both called by Christ. Each had their own mission, but it was part of the same calling. We could say that they complimented each other in their different approaches to the one mission. There isn't one of us who has it all. In our own following of Jesus, we share what we have and allow others to do the same, even if it means that we must let go of our own preferences. Discipleship is an invitation to respond to what Jesus wants of us, not what we think is needed.

### RE-OPENING OF CHURCHES

Preparations for the re-opening of Christ the King Church are underway. The re-opening process will be very gradual in order to ensure that we can meet all the safety regulations and reduce the risk of infection with Covid-19 to a minimum. It is important to note that Catholics will not be obliged to attend Sunday Mass for the foreseeable future. It is recommended that anyone who is shielding/cocooning for health reasons or anyone who has underlying health issues should stay at home and follow medical advice. Everyone who does enter the church or attend Mass, does so freely, aware that there is always a risk, no matter how slight, of contracting Covid19. It is impossible for us to know what the level of risk is at any given time.

More information about the Mass schedule will be provided next week.

**ORDINARY TIME WEEK 13**

**SUNDAY CYCLE: YEAR A / WEEKDAY CYCLE: YEAR 2**

**DIVINE OFFICE: Psalter 1**

**Christ the King Church is open for private prayer**

**11am-1pm from Monday to Friday**

**DETAILS OF LIVE STREAMS FROM St OSMUND's CHURCH**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Sat 27th June</b>                        | <b>Weekday in Ordinary Time</b>                                    |
| 10:00                                       | Mass   |
| <b>Sun 28th June</b>                        | <b>Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles</b>                |
| 10:00                                       | Mass   |
| 12:00                                       | Ordinariate Mass   |
| 18:00                                       | Mass   |
| <b>Mon 29th June</b>                        | <b>Weekday in Ordinary Time</b>                                    |
| 10:00                                       | Mass   |
| 19:00                                       | Mass   |
| <b>Tue 30th June</b>                        | <b>Dedication of the Cathedral Church of Saints Peter and Paul</b> |
| 10:00                                       | Mass   |
| All Day Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament |  |
| 18:40                                       | Benediction  |
| 19:00                                       | Mass   |
| <b>Wed 1st July</b>                         | <b>Memorial of Saint Oliver Plunket, Bishop, Martyr</b>            |
| 10:00                                       | Mass   |
| 19:00                                       | Mass   |
| <b>Thur 2nd July</b>                        | <b>Weekday in Ordinary Time</b>                                    |
| 10:00                                       | Mass   |
| All Day Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament |  |
| 18:40                                       | Benediction  |
| 19:00                                       | Mass   |
| <b>Fri 3rd July</b>                         | <b>Feast of Saint Thomas, Apostle</b>                              |
| 10:00                                       | Mass   |
| 19:00                                       | Mass   |

**Christ the King Church resumes celebrating Mass**

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Sat 4th July</b> | <b>Weekday in Ordinary Time</b>                       |
| 6pm                 | Vigil Mass for the Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time |
| <b>Sun 5th July</b> | <b>FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME</b>             |
| 11:00am             | Holy Mass - <i>People of the Parish</i>               |

## Re-opening of our Church

**Request for Volunteers:** In order to reduce the risk of infection from Covid-19 the church will need to be cleaned every day after Mass and any other ceremonies that take place. If you are healthy and do not have any underlying health issues, could you spare an hour after Mass on any day to clean the church? Training will be provided. Stewards will also need to be available to guide parishioners as they negotiate the one-way system around the church and answer any questions. Would you be available to assist at one Mass a week, either on a week day or at a Sunday Mass? Training will be provided. Please contact the parish office or Father Saji for more information. Next Friday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July at 11.00 will be a day of deep cleaning for our church and the parish hall. I would like to invite as many people as possible to volunteer to clean the church in preparation for the celebration of the Masses commencing next at the weekend.

**FROM THE DESK OF FATHER SAJI!** Two hunters chartered an airplane to fly them into the forest to hunt wild animals. A week later the pilot came to take them back. He took a look at the animals they had shot and said, "This plane won't take more than two wild buffalos so you'll have to leave the others behind." "But last year the pilot let us take more than two buffalos in a plane this size," the hunters protested. The pilot was doubtful, but finally said, "Well, if you did it last year I guess we can do it again." So the plane took off with the pilot, two men, and five buffalos, but it could not gain height and crashed into a neighbouring hill. The men climbed out and looked around. One hunter said to the other, "Where do you think we are?" The other hunter inspected the surroundings and said, "I think we're about two miles to the left of where we crashed last year." It is common to ignore lessons in life that challenge us to become wiser, sensible people. Sometimes even those who speak God's word are not welcomed into our lives. Good judgement that others pass down to us renders calmness to life as it bridges personal knowledge with life experience. A person who strives to make better decisions gains self-development and growth through unexpected people who surprisingly enter into life in the same manner that Jesus entered into the life of many outcasts as he shared his insights and perceptions on life with sinners.

We live in a complicated world torn apart by the coronavirus, political convictions, an unstable economy, unemployment, and issues of racism. Many of the proverbs in the Bible are meant to insure us that wisdom, truth, moral choices and belief in God are real and attainable. This weekend's scripture reading from the Book of Kings (2 Kings 3:8-11, 14-16) is a tale of ordinary goodness that left a lasting impression on a prophet as a woman of influence invites Elisha to her house as she "urges him to dine with her" and provides him with hospitality that includes a room, bed, table, chair and lamp. It makes us understand that reaching out to another is derived from love within the heart as this woman exhibits to Elisha.

Life is full of the imperfect; a prominent stamp of wisdom is acceptance of human faults in oneself, others, country, and church in that God dwells in the midst of flawed people. Jesus communicated abundant hope to those put down by society, and offered encouragement and compassion to people unaccepted by most of humanity. Many today are spurned due to their cultural backgrounds or inability to cope with some of the demands placed on them; especially throughout these days of social distancing. The wisdom of Jesus liberated people and gave all equal status. As he broke down the walls that separated people even within Jewish traditions, Jesus discovered gentlehearted ways to point fingers at those blinded by their own self-righteousness unmindful of their own hypocrisy. Wisdom gained through repeated miscalculations must ripen us to see the world in ways that fulfil our mission and God given purpose.

God pilots our plane, yet renders free will to make erroneous oversights as the hunters did in their return from the forest. Summer offers abundant opportunities to put into practice some of the intelligence attained through employment, education and human relationships even if we have to continue to distance ourselves from one another. I do not recall the last time I shook hands with a person, however I am often tempted to do so. I also wonder about the next time an opportunity will arise for me to engage in this tradition aware that God did not create me to keep my hands in my pockets. There have been so many teachable moments throughout these past four months. Although we are encouraged to move slowly, there is an urge to fill up our plane with all the goods that have accumulated throughout this time unaware that doing too much too soon may cause the plane to crash. As we will hear many parables from Matthew's Gospel during these summer weeks, may each one enable us to comprehend new waves of intelligence so that we do not repeat mistakes of the past knowing that no matter how much we plan and prepare, we can never control the world around us.

**MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS, HEAL AND STRENGTHEN YOUR FAMILIES!**

**A Happy and Most Glorious Feast Day of Sts. Peter and Paul!:** Today is a first-class feast and a patronal one of our Diocese, named for the Prince of the Apostles. St. Peter is the rock upon which Christ built His Church, the first of those Vicars that He has put in place to keep her on firm footing as she treads the often twisted and tempestuous paths of history. St. Paul's mission was to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, which he was uniquely suited to do, being both a Jew and a Roman. The Acts of the Apostles and his own letters to the various churches among which he worked bear testament to the incredible extent of his journeys and labours, which would start one fateful day on the road to Damascus, take him thousands of miles through Israel, Syria, Turkey and Greece and end with his martyrdom in Rome.

The lives of both saints are parables of God's mercy and Providence: St. Peter is almost as well-known for his denial of Christ as for his confession of Him, and St. Paul, before becoming Christianity's most avid missionary, was first its most avid adversary. "But by the grace of God, I am what I am; and his grace in me hath not been void", says St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, proclaiming in the second letter to the same community that "power is made perfect in infirmity". Certainly these two saints and their prayers on our behalf should give us every reason to hope that God will use our own infirmities as illustrations of His divine power, which is able to turn our frail humanity into just what He needs to accomplish His Will if we, like Sts. Peter and Paul, respond to the call.

Today's Mass is primarily concerned with the Apostle Peter, the Epistle recounting his miraculous deliverance from prison by the angel, and the Gospel his confession of Christ's divinity. This feast is normally followed on June 30th by the Commemoration of St. Paul, a Mass more specifically dedicated to the Apostle of the Gentiles, though this year the feast falls on a Sunday so it will be superseded by the Mass of the Sunday.

As we celebrate the feast of the two 'chief apostles' – St Peter and St Paul. Both were faithful rocks on whom Jesus built his Church, unshakeable in their belief that Jesus was the Christ, and ever-faithful to the universal mission he gave them. They can greatly encourage us as we, too, try to be Church today, following Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

The Church prays continuously for Peter throughout his ordeal as he lies enchained in Herod's prison. But then an angel comes to release him and Peter realises that the Lord really has saved him. (First Reading) The Psalmist has also been released from his distress, and invites us to glorify God with him. We, too, can trust that the Lord will answer when we seek refuge in him, and will free us from our terrors. Paul, like Peter, is also in prison, and knows that the end of his life is near. But he rejoices that he has kept faith: God has always been with him in his struggles and will bring him safely home. (Second Reading) As Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Son of the Living God, Jesus establishes him as the rock on which he will build his Church, and entrusts him with the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. (Gospel)

This week, as we give thanks for the lives of St Peter and St Paul, we pray for that same courage to put our trust in Christ Jesus, whatever trials we may face in life. Let's ask, too, for God's help as we work together to try to build up his Church. **In Christ's Love.**

**A WORD FROM FATHER SAJI:** Some time ago after the Mass on a Sunday a person asked if I thought there are "Times we need to forgive God?" My first reaction was, "Sorry, could you repeat that?" Definitely one of those "Can we talk about this in the office?" questions. That is when the person let me know she was a visitor. The best I could offer in the moment was, "I will have to think about that." That was a better response than my first reaction, left unexpressed: "Seriously?" along with an intuitive "That isn't right." It seemed to me that somewhere there was a basic understanding that we humans sin and God forgives. That is just the way it works. When would a situation arise that required us to forgive God? Of course, the person went on her way leaving me to speculate as to the root of the question. There is a part of me that wondered if it was just another modern feel-good encroachment into the sphere of faith aimed at making sure no one feels bad about themselves.

The school of thought that says we don't want anyone to feel shame, guilt, dishonour, remorse, even if... well... that might just be an appropriate human response to what the person has done. Or perhaps this was a new (or old) theological heresy. The TV charlatans have a way of resurrecting the old heresies as the latest gambit to separate us from our money. The thing about heresy is that it asks very interesting questions, even if they are judged to come down on the wrong side of the answer. So maybe I should stop and think about the question, even if it seemed a bit odd. Are there times we need to forgive God?

When I pondered a bit longer it seems many Christians operate under basic assumptions. Consider these: Trust in God and He will not let you down. If God shuts the door, He opens a window. Nothing happens in the world that is outside God's plan and perfect will. And yet there is sorrow, suffering, burdens, barriers, inequality, and injustice in the world – and more. We feel a little let down, can't see the open portal, and if this is "the plan" we want a revision. Of course, with all of our human presumptions about God we set ourselves up to be disappointed when we cannot hear God respond in the moments that we most want God to respond. It is then that we join the women and men of Scripture.

The Psalms record numerous times when the cry is “My God, I call by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I have no relief.” (22:2) The author of Lamentations writes, “The Lord has become the enemy...” (2:5). Job rages on for chapters against God who seems distant and hidden. The ancestors in faith all had moments when they did not understand, felt hurt and betrayed, and had no idea what to do next, nor how to process the mystery that is God. The thing is that they still wanted God in their lives even as they expressed their disappointments. They didn’t walk away; they were not indifferent. I wondered if any of those incidents were moments when our ancestors had the passing thought: “I need to forgive God.” Did you know that the origin of the word “forgive” comes from an old English word *forgiefan*, which is itself made up of two words: *giefan*, meaning “give” and *for-*, meaning “completely.” So the word *forgiefan* conveys the sense of giving completely.

Perhaps there is a sense that we need to forgive God if what is meant is that we need to give ourselves completely to God – as God has already given completely: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” (John 3:16) God has given us his oath, his covenant, in the life, death, and Resurrection of his Son. “God so loved...” I find it interesting that another and surprising meaning of *forgiefan* is “to give in marriage.” I think that all couples whose marriages have endured for decades can tell stories of moments they did not understand, felt hurt and betrayed, and had no idea of what to do next, nor how to express the mystery that is love. The thing is that they still wanted their spouse in their life even as they expressed their disappointments. They did not walk away, they were not indifferent. The same can be said of parents and children as well as priests and their fraternity.

In our relationships we don’t become angry with people we do not care about. We don’t fight about things for which we are indifferent. We struggle for the things that matter. We are hurt, disappointed, and disheartened, but we work towards forgiving. We work to again give ourselves completely to the relationship, to the covenant that is marriage, family, and fraternity – to the covenant of faith that is made in the person of Jesus Christ. So maybe there are times we need to *forgiefan* God. We need to renew our part in the covenant and again give ourselves completely to God. To work towards “forgiving” God is to insist that He matters above all else. It is to say, “God, no matter what you say, don’t say, do, or don’t do, you, I, and this community are in this for the long haul. I will not let you go.” Sometimes the conversation is too important to have on the journey of life.

**Share Christ-Celebrate Christ-Live Christ:** Today’s readings take us back to some basics of stewardship living. The First Reading shows us the necessity and power of hospitality. The Second Reading reminds us what it is that makes us disciples and Christian stewards in the first place (hint: it’s our Baptism). Finally, in today’s Gospel, Christ teaches us how to live daily life as His stewards. Our First Reading, from 2 Kings, tells the story of a woman who showed loving hospitality to a visitor, inviting him to dinner with her family and arranging a room for him in their home so that he would have a comfortable place to stay during his travels through her town. She reached out to the man in a simple and practical manner to make him feel welcome. That is the essence of Christian hospitality. As it turns out, this man was none other than the prophet Elisha. He rewarded her kindness by interceding with God to obtain for her the miracle of a baby boy after long years of infertility.

In our Second Reading, from the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul reminds us of the power of our Baptism and how it is that this sacrament makes us disciples and therefore stewards. He says that through Baptism “into Christ Jesus” we were both buried with Christ and now are alive in Christ. We are literally new creations, marked for all eternity as one of His own. What does that mean for us here and now? St. Paul tells us very clearly: “You too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.” We must live for Christ! Nothing less will do. Our Lord Himself proclaims this same instruction in a rather shocking way in our Gospel passage from Matthew: “Whoever loves father or mother... son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” And, “Whoever finds his life [by living for oneself] will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” How can an all-loving Lord say such things? Precisely because He is the source of all love —He is love incarnate. We can only love others, and even ourselves truly, if we allow ourselves to be emptied of self-love and filled with God’s love.

This is why our Lord tells us we must “lose our lives.” Putting ourselves or others —even those dearest to us —above God simply cannot give us the ultimate fulfilment and peace of soul that we all want. Only God can do that. Only loving God first and living for Christ —“losing our life” —can do that. But how do we know if we love God more than “father or mother or son or daughter”? Jesus tells us in the next verses. And the fascinating genius of it all is that it is precisely through loving actions towards others, loving them as if they were Christ, that we demonstrate our love for Christ! “Whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because the little one is a disciple... he will surely not lose his reward.” So, we have come full circle to the importance of hospitality, and to putting God first in our lives because we have become disciples of Christ through our Baptism. We put God first by serving others as if we were serving Christ Himself, thus losing a self-centred life and finding our true fulfilment.

**TO KNOW OUR CATHOLIC FAITH:** St. Peter the Apostle St. Peter was from a town called Bethsaida, near the Sea of Galilee, and lived when Jesus walked the earth. He was a fisherman with his brother Andrew. One day, Jesus passed by and invited the two brothers to follow Him, and He would make them fishers of men. So, they did follow Jesus and indeed became fishers of men in every sense of the word and brought many, many disciples to the Lord Jesus. One day Jesus said, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church." Then He gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Did you know that St. Peter is the first pope of the Church? Every pope since St. Peter is his Successor and the Vicar of Christ on earth. As pope, he guided the Church as Jesus taught him with love, charity and obedience. He never abandoned the Church. As he made his way he travelled to Rome, preaching the gospel with fervour and the gentleness of a lamb. He was arrested and later crucified upside down because he said he was not worthy to die like Jesus. As living stones, like St. Peter, we want to build up the Church on earth with our prayers, sufferings, disappointments, and sacrifices. Let us celebrate his feast day with joy and praise to Christ for the gift of St. Peter and on June 29 allow the grace of fortitude to guide us always towards the will of God. Let us pray on St. Peter's feast day and ask him to continue to guide the Church, to touch each of us and to use each of us to bring glory to Jesus' mystical bride on earth, Holy Mother Church! St. Peter, pray for us...

**Reflections from Father Saji:** Ten years ago, when staying for a retreat in a Monastery, I was put up in one of the "cells" of the monastery. "Cells" are small buildings with a living room/study area, bedroom, and bathroom which house one priest or brother. They also had an enclosed yard often hosting a garden as well. Since there are more "cells" than members living in the community, and since I was a relative of one of the monks, Brother Emmanuel, I was granted permission to stay in one of these unique dwellings. Located in a couple of places within my cell were signs stating there was no internet and at all times one needed to maintain a silent atmosphere. Because the Hermitage's location in the middle of nowhere and two miles up a road from the ocean, even mobile phones were of no use. Nonetheless, I am comfortable with silence, so having to keep silent wasn't a concern for me. Sustaining a noiseless environment is more than refraining from uttering words or listening to music. It is also keeping away from a frenzied, fast pace life, filled with all kinds of activity.

Our lives have become so "noisy" that we can often fail to be grateful and enjoy what we have. We alone can create so much noise, we fail to appreciate those who are part of our lives. During these past three months, I have had time to reflect how my own hectic lifestyle has to some extent kept me from enjoying many things and the people in my life. Things have changed though! Surprisingly, I have noticed some changes in myself during this pandemic. I tend to be calmer and more patient in situations that I can't control. I have enjoyed just "being", instead of "doing". I find myself not getting so upset about the little things in life. Admittedly, in previous years when something turned upside down, I would become upset and say a few unpleasant words. Now, well most of the time, I patiently get over and fix my temperament without blood pressure rising. Even more astonishing, I find ways to do something constructive while I wait on something without much difficulty. It's odd, these times we are living in are making me busier in a new way, that is, reconnecting with family and friends. I am so grateful for this new kind of busyness, as it is far more meaningful and rewarding. I can really just be with the people I love and care about instead of doing. There are certainly some good things coming out of this coronavirus outbreak such as the above, but I will be glad when it all ends as long as these new changes stay an integral part in my life. What meaningful life changes will you carry with you when this all ends? Have a blessed week!

**SAINTS PETER & PAUL, APOSTLES- SUNDAY THOUGHT** Today we remember Saints Peter and Paul: two men so different, and yet so profoundly one in their faith, in their love for Jesus and his Church, in their Apostleship, and ultimately in their martyrdom in Rome. Two men certainly not born equipped to serve God, but who became equipped by Jesus himself with the grace necessary to become the human foundations upon which the whole of the Roman Catholic Church stands. Peter is the "rock" on which Christ built his Church. Recorded in the gospels as betraying Jesus three times in one eventful night, who finds it so difficult to abandon kosher food and eat with non-Jews - this same Peter, a poorly-educated fisherman, prone to outbursts and weak under pressure, is the rock. His great capacity for love made Peter the perfect candidate for Jesus' call.

Paul was a fiery, intellectual Pharisee who life had been persecuting Christians in Jerusalem. But his experience of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus was the driving force that made Paul one of the most zealous, dynamic, and courageous ambassadors the Church has ever known. Christ saw that Paul's very strong personality was needed to help the Jews to accept that Jesus was the Saviour of all, and to initiate the Church's outreach to the Gentiles.

We must ask ourselves: if a denier and a murderer can be transformed by the mercy of Jesus Christ, why can't I? Why can't Jesus be calling me to do great things in my family, my workplace, my parish, my community, my country, my Church? Peter and Paul became apostles not through their own merits, but through their experience of Jesus' mercy. We don't have to be perfect for God to work through us - both our talents and our weaknesses can become God's means of helping others, if we allow. May God grant us the grace we need to constantly renew and transform our lives with the great hope we find in Peter and Paul, two unlikely men called by God to do great things.

**LEAN ON THE LORD:** From East to West, North to South, indeed, in every part of the world, “the Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe” (Prov. 18:10). From the beginning of the Bible, Genesis, to the end of it, Revelation, there was no single person who leaned on the Lord and later regretted it. This is because, the Name of the Lord is a strong tower, and by leaning on the Lord, we are made strong, never to fall. Jesus alone is the Lord and Master of our life. He “is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress. Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken and mountains quake to the depths of the sea” (Ps. 46:1-3). Right here, we see the reason to lean on the Lord no matter what is happening in the world. We need the Lord to help us in our everyday life. Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). Leaning on God does not mean that we should not make use of the support systems we have at our disposal. It does mean that while we make use of them and other things that help humanity, we should not make them number one in our life, as if our life depends on them and not on the Lord. It is the Lord who helps us through the instrumentality of those things. The Bible says that “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain” (Ps. 127: 1-2). The fruitfulness of everything depends on God. Let us therefore always lean on the Lord.

**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT** One of the heartbreaks of this terrible virus (and there are many) is the way it has kept families apart. On the phone with me during the week was a grandmother who had spent a long time waiting for the opportunity to once again see her grandchildren. The build-up was great and the longing of eight weeks was coming to an end. She worked out in her imagination what would happen. They might rush and cuddle her and at this stage she wasn’t going to stop that- it had been too long her heart was breaking. The day came and it was like a meeting from ‘Long Lost Family’ but it didn’t happen go so smoothly. She loves them all dearly but the little fellow would have nothing to do with her. His mother tried to explain ‘its grandma’ but no amount of cajoling would work. He didn’t seem to know who she was! I reminded her he is only four but that was of no help! She went home devastated. By the time she spoke to me she had got her act together and grown from the experience. Let us hope we have all matured through our experience of Covid! Let us pray this week for grandparents who are trying to make up for lost time – robbed by the virus.

**Kissing the Altar at Mass:** Question: Why do priests kiss the altar at the start of Mass? Answer: Our churches and chapels are filled with symbols. We might think of the more common symbols (like the crucifix, statues, stained-glass windows, vestment colour and altar cloths) as well as major symbols (such as the paschal candle and the baptismal font). But there are some things that we can take for granted in our sacred spaces, because unfortunately, they seem to just be part of the building, including three of the main symbols of our liturgy: the ambo (lectern), the chair for the priest celebrant, and the altar. These three objects are placed in a specially designated area called the sanctuary. They are the places where the Word of God is proclaimed, where the priest prays and presides at the celebration, and where the bread and wine are offered by the priest during the Eucharistic Prayer. Although each of these objects is sacred because of the role they play in our worship, the altar holds a special place. In a document containing the rules and instructions for the Mass —the “General Instruction of the Roman Missal” —we read: “The altar on which the Sacrifice of the Cross is made present under sacramental signs is also the table of the Lord to which the People of God is called together to participate in the Mass, as well as the centre of the thanksgiving that is accomplished throughout the Eucharist” (no. 296). One of the ways that we recognize the importance of the altar is when the priest and deacon kiss the altar at the beginning of Mass. Kissing is an ancient act of devotion. Remember, we also kiss the cross on Good Friday, and the deacon or priest kisses the “Book of the Gospels” after the Gospel is proclaimed. This act of devotion reminds us that the altar is a symbol of Jesus, the “living stone” (see 1 Peter 2:4), the foundation stone of our faith. It is a symbol gesture, but it is a powerful reminder of the One on whom our faith is built and in whose name we gather as the “household of faith” (see Galatians 6:10). To learn more, see the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” (no. 1382-1383)

**Pastoral Pondering:** Over the past several weeks, we have been striving to be able to provide sacramental ministry by being somewhat creative and doing those things that are recommended by the Bishops’ Conference and others. During the course of that same time, I have had discussions with those who will not come to Mass because everyone is not wearing a mask as well as those who will not come to Mass because they are offended by being asked to wear a mask. At the same time, we have been using enhanced cleaning protocols to kill germs, but even this is problematic for some who are sensitive to smells and chemicals in general. Being caught in a “catch 22” is nothing new for the Church and nothing new for most priests. Nonetheless, it can be frustrating when you are trying to do your best to address the situation before you. Being reminded that you can’t please everyone is helpful, but desiring the greatest possible access for people also weighs heavily. Suffice it to say that we are trying to do our best based on the current guidelines that we have. Mask wearing is recommended in general but required when a safe physical distance cannot be maintained. We will continue to monitor the situation and the changing guidance (sometimes daily) to make the most prudent and reasonable decisions as we move forward. We are discussing the possibility of having a “Mask-only” Mass that would provide for those who are especially concerned about this. We will continue to look at this possibility.

We have made some operating priorities as we move forward with reopening. Our first priority has been and continues to be offering sacramental ministry to our people. It is for this reason that other groups, gatherings and meetings are not being held on campus. By phases we will gradually open the facilities up to more activities and apostolates; although, those activities that are specifically elder-focused may continue to be curtailed due to the risk that they pose for that population.

During this time of social distancing, we have found new habits of prayer and action, I pray that as we return to public Masses next weekend, we continue to nurture our lives with the ways we have done in the past few months, incorporating our new habits of increased private prayer time, time with our families, and acts of love and kindness towards our neighbours. Each of these new habits draws us closer to Jesus and prepare us to receive Him in the Eucharist. Like branches, we are nourished by the vine of Jesus Christ, truly present in the Eucharist, to help us bear fruit in our daily lives. Be assured of my prayers as we continue to navigate this strange new reality. Please continue to pray for each other as we strive to address our current situation and move forward in faith, hope, and love. Thank you for your understanding as we navigate these uncharted waters. Thank you also for your prayers. With all abundant joy, may God bless you and our whole family in Christ, our community and our nation in these times and always.

Being positive and optimistic in attitude: Use positivity, rather than letting negativity use you. There may not be an obvious reason to be positive today, but you don't need a reason. Being positive is a strategy, not a response. The most powerful time to be positive is precisely when everything around you is not so positive. Happiness in the long run is not the absence of problems, but the ability to deal with them. Raise your awareness to your own inner strength and positivity. You are in charge of how you react to the people and events in your life. You can either give negativity power over your life, or you can choose to be positive instead by focusing on the great things that are truly important. So talk about your blessings more than you talk about your problems today. In other words, don't wait for a reason to be positive. Choose to be positive about your situation, about your possibilities, and about what you can do to move forward from here. Instead of looking for reasons to be positive, look for ways to express your positive vision. Work to make your life resonate with that vision, and enjoy all the rewarding outcomes you create. Focus on making tiny fixes. Don't build mountains in your mind. Don't try to conquer the world all at once. When you seek instant gratification (big, quick fixes) you make life unnecessarily painful and frustrating. When you choose instead to treat each moment as an opportunity to make a tiny, positive investment in yourself, the rewards come naturally.

When everything is broken, it's easy to find plenty of little things you can fix. When nothing seems to be going right, even the most fundamental positive effort can make a significant difference. Times of great adversity are also times of great opportunity. When there are problems in every direction, there is also great value waiting to be created. When everything is going well, it's easy to get lulled into a routine of complacency. It's easy to forget how incredibly capable and resourceful you can be. Resolve to persevere by making tiny fixes every day. It's these minor tweaks that take you from where you are to where you want to be in the long run. Small steps, little leaps, and tiny fixes (very small repetitive changes) every day will get you there, through thick and thin.

You may not have what you want, and you may be very hurt, but you still have more than enough to appreciate right now. Epicurus once said, "Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for." Remember that being positive in a negative situation is not naive; it's a sign of leadership and strength. You're doing it right when you have so much to cry and complain about, but you prefer to smile and appreciate your life instead. So don't pray for the big miracles and forget to give thanks for the ordinary, simple, and yet not-so-small gifts in your life. It may seem strange to feel thankful for those events in your life that appear to be ordinary, yet it's precisely by being thankful that you can transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

At the end of the day, it's not happiness that makes us thankful, but thankfulness that makes us happy. Showing appreciation for the good things you have is the most powerful happiness boosting activity there is. Resisting and ignoring your own feelings and emotions does not serve you. It leads to stress, illness, confusion, broken relationships, fits of anger and bouts of deep, dark depression. You have to admit, to a certain extent, you have spent too much of your life trying to shrink yourself. It's not your job to change who you are in order to become someone else's idea of a worthwhile human being. You are worthwhile. Not because other people think you are, but because you are breathing your own air, and therefore you matter. Your thoughts matter. Your feelings matter. Your voice matters. And with or without anyone's approval or permission, you must be who you are and live your truth. Even if it makes people turn their heads. Even if it makes them uncomfortable. Even if they choose to leave. Choose yourself!

We need to remember that all of us can heal through hardships, and many of us are even catapulted onto a more meaningful, motivated path after experiencing one. Growth through hard times is far more common than most of us realise. The challenge is to bring awareness to the opportunity presented by these kinds of unexpected and undesirable events. Afterward, we need hope. In the aftermath of intense pain, we need to know there is something better—and there almost always is. A traumatic experience is not simply a painful experience to be endured. Instead, it can be incredibly life changing by motivating us to evolve in the best ways possible.

**BE BLESSED AND BE A BLESSING**