

Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Columba's,

Peace be with you all!

Well, where did YOU go to Mass today?! I have been receiving e-mails, texts, and phone calls from various parishioners, telling me of their 'virtual' Masses: some of you have been going to Aberdeen, to Fr. Tad's Mass, on the rcda.scot website; others have been travelling down to Glasgow, to St. Andrew's Cathedral, or are touring the city parishes there. I know of one person crossing over to the Emerald Isle, to County Sligo for Mass. More enterprising parishioners have been jetting off, either to the Casa Santa Marta in the Vatican, to be with Pope Francis, or – even further – to sunny California, to join Bishop Robert Barron in his Private Chapel.

The point is that with modern technology, we have the means to participate virtually in a Mass in any part of the world, and at almost any time. It is a truly wonderful experience, and it highlights the power of the internet as a vehicle for something good, as a tool for evangelisation, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

For me, Mass was also unique, but in a different way. I celebrated Mass at the usual Sunday time – 9.30am – as I knew that many of you were uniting yourselves in spiritual solidarity with me and with one another at that time. However, it was indeed strange. As I prepared the credence table for Mass, and looked out from the sanctuary, I was confronted by a sea of empty chairs, of silence, of no-one looking back at me. At that moment, it brought home several important points. Firstly, the Church, as a spiritual entity, comprises the People of God. The word 'church' comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means 'assembly'. It is the Body of Christ that makes up the living, breathing, vibrant worshipping community of faith that lies at the very heart of our parish of St. Columba's. It is all of you, the flock, and I realised this morning just how much your absence strikes home. The shepherd misses his sheep!

Even though you are not there physically, you are still present: in the liturgy, in the Prayers of Intercession, in the Intentions made before the beginning of the Mass, and in the Act of Thanksgiving after it has ended. We are united through our faith, our prayers, our hopes and aspirations, our anxieties, and above all, by our love of Christ. This is why I prepared the church at the end of today's Mass, covering the processional cross and statues in purple, as a sign of the increasingly sombre mood, and the impending events of Holy Week and the Passion. Other, more mundane things, are being attended to: the clocks have been adjusted accordingly, the heating controls have been reset, even the cacti

and plants have been watered! St. Columba's will be ready for the wonderful day when we are all together again!

You will find further resources, too, on our parish website: I have added a few things to our 'Coronavirus: A Parish Response' page, and I have also created a page to showcase Pope Francis' Extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* Address on Thursday. It was, quite simply, an utterly poignant spectacle to see the clearly weary, suffering Holy Father – the Servant of the Servants of God – making his way up St. Peter's Square, amidst driving rain, to the *Sagrado* in front of the basilica, alone and in the darkness. You can watch the entire liturgy on our website, and can also take the opportunity to read Pope Francis' immensely powerful reflections, based on Mark's account of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mk 4:35 ff.). May the Good Lord continue to bless our Pope, to watch over him, and to continue to give him the strength and the grace that he needs to fulfil his ministry as Vicar of Christ.

Our local shepherd, Bishop Hugh, has also released an important message for everyone in the Diocese of Aberdeen; you can find this at the beginning of our Coronavirus page. Do take the time to listen to it.

Above all, take heart, and trust in the goodness of the Lord. We may be living through the worst crisis in recent memory, but Jesus is present here with us. We may feel that he is sleeping, that he is not acting quickly enough, but we need to have confidence that he hears our cries, our prayers. "Why are you so afraid?", Jesus asks his disciples, huddled together in the boat, as it is tossed this way and that on the stormy waters. As we sit, huddled together at home, fearful of the stormy waters that swirl around our world, Christ asks that same question to us. May you all continue to have faith, to support one another, to remain strong as a loving community, and to care for each another. "Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Wishing you and your families every grace and blessing during this uncertain time, and with the assurance of my fervent prayers for you all,
Fr. Domenico.