

Eve of the Solemnity of St. Joseph

Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Columba's,

Greetings to you all!

I hope that you are keeping well, and staying safe.

You will have heard of the latest measures by the UK government. The Church is also stepping up, and I include as an attachment the Pastoral Letter and Statement issued by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland.

Tomorrow's evening Mass (Thursday) for the Solemnity of St. Joseph at 7.30pm will be the last PUBLIC Mass for the foreseeable future. You may want to make a special effort to be there, and to unite yourself in solidarity with one another.

Given the fact that there are quite a few parishioners without internet access, and who will be unaware of these changes, **this week's Sunday Mass will be celebrated at 9.30am as usual, albeit in a rather scaled-down way.** The doors of the church will be open, and whoever wishes to join me is very welcome to do so.

We Parish Priests will continue to celebrate Mass – in Private - with the particular intention of praying for those suffering from Covid-19 and for those who care for them.

St. Columba's will be open each day for one hour for personal prayer. The numbers will be extremely small, and there will be plenty of room to spread out!

There will be Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament every day, from 11.00am-12 noon, beginning on Monday 23 March.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) will be available upon request. Just phone me to make an appointment, and come to the church.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our Christian life, and it is extremely hard for us whenever we are deprived of it. Please God these coming days and weeks without the public celebration of Holy Mass will lead us all to a renewed appreciation for the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist.

In the meantime, what we can do to keep our spiritual lives flourishing?

Here are some ideas for you below.

1. Make a Spiritual Communion

Spiritual Communion is the heartfelt desire to receive Our Lord, even when we are unable because of the distance or for some other reason. **This desire to receive him through spiritual Communion is an act of love which prolongs our thanksgiving even when we are not in the Eucharistic presence of Our Lord.** The wish to live constantly in his presence can be fuelled by acts of love and desire to be united with him and is a means of drawing more deeply from the life of the Holy Spirit dwelling within our souls in the state of grace.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century Dominican theologian and Doctor of the Church, “The effects of a sacrament can be received by desire. Although in such a case the sacrament is not received physically ... nevertheless the actual reception of the sacrament itself brings with it fuller effect than receiving it through desire alone”.

Here are several prayers that you can use:

From St Alphonsus Liguori:

My Jesus, I believe that You are truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as being already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

From St Thomas More:

I wish, my Lord, to receive You with the purity, humility and devotion with which your Most Holy Mother received You, with the spirit and fervour of the saints. Come Lord Jesus.

Give me, good Lord, a longing to be with You ... give me warmth, delight and quickness in thinking upon You. And give me Your grace to long for Your holy sacraments, and specially to rejoice in the presence of Your very blessed Body, Sweet Saviour Christ, in the Holy Sacrament of the altar.

2. Watch Mass Live-Streamed on the internet

It may not be the same as being there, but if you can watch a Mass online, it will help you to maintain your spiritual routine. Some options for watching Mass online are included in the attachment, including Bishop Robert Barron’s Mass in his Private Chapel, EWTN, and Pope Francis (in Italian!).

If you live with other members of the family, you may like to gather together to watch Mass, in order to create a sense of community. Watching Mass at the

same time every Sunday – or indeed every weekday – may help you to create a new routine, which will be particularly important to your wellbeing, if you're housebound or self-isolating, or without Mass for a long time. Even if you have no one to watch with you, watching online will help you to feel that you belong to a worldwide community of believers – to Christ's Church.

3. Read and Reflect on the Mass readings of the day

There are many websites and apps that offer the daily Mass readings. One site is Universalis, which offers both the Mass Readings and the complete Divine Office, the universal prayer of the Church. If you don't currently pray this, why not try now? It's a wonderful devotion for Lent, and it is reassuring to know that the psalms and readings you are reflecting upon are being prayed by millions of other fellow Catholics all over the world. Many of you have said to me that you'd like to read the Bible, or to know it better? This is an excellent time. I include as an attachment a reading plan for you, to help you in this endeavour. Want to know more about your faith? Have a look at Bishop Robert Barron's Word on Fire website (<https://www.wordonfire.org/>), or the study programmes and audio and visual resources on Scott Hahn's site (<https://stpaulcenter.com/>).

4. Devotional Prayers

How often do you pray the Rosary? Or the Angelus? During Lent, the practice of the Church is to pray the Stations of the Cross. These are all wonderful devotions, and something that you can easily do, either by yourself or with others. All of these prayers are available online, if you are unfamiliar with them.

5. Mark the Lord's Day

When you're housebound for weeks on end, or even if you're no longer commuting, you may find it harder to notice that it's a Sunday as it becomes just the same as every other day. It's more important than ever, then, to mark the Sabbath. You might like to make an effort to wear your "Sunday best", even if you're not leaving the house (a good excuse to 'doll up'!), or to have a day free from computer or TV screens, or to pray the rosary together as a household, with the other members of your family, or to meet together to read the Sunday Mass Readings, or compose our own prayers of intercession. Perhaps, if your circumstances allow, you could make a special effort to do something nice for someone in self-isolation, whether that's a relative or a neighbour. Remember that we are part of a Church with over 1.2 BILLION fellow Catholics! We are all members of a very large family, and we are united together by our common faith in Jesus Christ. Let's not forget our brothers and sisters around the world.

6. Spend time together as a family

Those of you who are married and with children have a wonderful opportunity to grow closer to one another through this unique time. Switch off the TV for one hour at an agreed time each day and have a ‘family chat’ about different pre-selected topics. Get involved in activities involving everyone in the house. How many of us still play board games?! Now is the time to revive this! Charades, anyway? Cards? Monopoly? Jigsaws? Have you always wanted to learn a language? Why not try it now, via the internet (Youtube) or with Apps (Duolingo, Busuu). Do you like exercise? There are plenty of online workouts that you can do at home – the Body Coach has a large number available on Youtube FOR FREE (<https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1>), or for only £100 a year, you have access to literally thousands of workouts via Beachbody on Demand (<https://www.beachbodyondemand.com/>). Have a look at our own parish website, and think about what you would like to see there, or ways in which you could improve it. I welcome any and all suggestions!! Why not try cooking or baking together? It can just as fun as it is infuriating! Have a competition to make hot cross buns, or any other goodies! Share your results on our parish Facebook page (and then enjoy eating them on Sunday!) Use Facebook to swop recipes, put up poems and favourite hymns/songs, passages from Holy Scripture and novels that inspire you. Photographs of favourite places. The list is endless.

7. It's good to talk..

Use this time to phone friends you haven't spoken to in some time. A familiar voice on the other end of the line is always a welcome surprise! Keep in touch with one another. I've spent most of today on the phone to housebound and elderly parishioners, assuring them of my prayerful support, and enquiring whether they need any shopping, or anything done for them. It was good to hear that folk are bearing up well. Everyone seems to be attended to. Let's not forget those who are most frail in our community.

8. Annoy your Parish Priest!

Only kidding! Remember that I am only a phone call away, if you feel the need to talk about anything: if you're lonely, or just want a chat, or want to give vent because your spouse is driving you up the wall (!). Whatever it is, I am on the other end of the line, and will happily listen.

Above all, try to see this new period as a time of grace, a ‘domestic retreat’, which will nourish you spiritually, and give you the opportunity to grow ever closer to one another and to the Lord.

I'll end here – for the moment – with these words from the prophet Jeremiah:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:11-14)

May the Good Lord continue to bless you all and keep you safe.
Be assured of my prayers for you, each and every day.
Fr. Domenico.