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Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church
Catlow Hall Street, Oswaldtwistle
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DIOCESE OF  SALFORD

Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. S D O'Brien
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Saturday 11th July 2020
The Feast of Saint Benedict

Dear brothers and sisters,

Many people have shared with me over this past week some of their own heart breaking and tragic stories caused by the Coronavirus. So many families and communities have been effected by this virus and sadly it still continues to plague us all. Statistics, figures and charts can only convey so much information but it's the real people who are behind each number that brings home the true cost and reality of Covid-19. I was therefore grateful to the parishioner who passed on the following joke which made me smile this week:

Question: How many Catholics does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: None. Catholics don't do change!

I think in this last week at St. Mary's and throughout the whole Church we have all proven this statement to be false. Catholic churches up and down the country have changed and adapted. We have all trawled through mountains of paperwork, wrestled with risk assessments and tackled safeguarding procedures to make sure that our doors have opened. Why? For the simple reason that our churches are not mere meeting places but sacred spaces that contain the very presence of the Risen Christ in the Tabernacle. We can maintain and look after our physical bodies but we must not forget the soul. To keep our souls healthy for this life and the next there is only one medicine – the life giving grace that radiates from being in the very presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Church will be open for private silent prayer on the following days:

Wednesday 15th July 9:30am – 11am

Friday 17th July 5pm – 6:30pm

Saturday 18th July 9:30am – 11am

As always thank you to those who have made the re-opening of our church a reality.

The Sacrament of Confession

I will be available, on request, to hear Confessions from Friday 17th July. In accordance with diocesan safeguarding policy and government social distancing directives, the confessional in church is not temporarily permitted. However, in the rear presbytery garden, which is monitored by CCTV, there is a secure and safe area for the Sacrament of Confession (weather permitting sadly). If you would like to receive this Sacrament please contact me by email or phone to make an appointment.

The Holy Mass

The next piece of good news I would like to announce is that we now have permission to celebrate weekday Mass publicly, beginning on Tuesday 21st July. To abide by government directives and diocesan policy for public health and safety there are a number of practical things we are told we have to remember and adhere to.

Preparation

- We are all still dispensed by the Bishop from the Sunday obligation.
- The government and the Bishop have limited the number of people attending the Holy Mass at our church to 30 people.

- In order that we comply with this requirement and maintain social distancing, a temporary phone booking system will be in place. This is not ideal but we do not live in ideal times at the moment. I would like to thank Ursula Heyes who has kindly volunteered to undertake this temporary work.
- To book please ring Ursula on Wednesday 15th July from 5pm - 6pm or on Friday 17th July from 5pm – 6pm on 232 433. For those parishioners that you know, who do not have access to the parish website, could you kindly pass this information on.
- People can also book online via the parish website where they will find this link: www.bookings.stmaryoswaldtwistle.org.uk This link will be activated on the evening of Wednesday 15th July. Again you can only book for you or your household.
- When you book you will be asked for personal contact details in regards to the government's Track & Trace system. In line with GDPR those details will be held securely for one month and then destroyed.
- When you book, it will be for one particular Mass at a specific date and time, you are not booking a Mass for perpetuity.
- Families may sit together. Please state this when booking as all household members contact details will be required.
- You cannot book on behalf of another person. One household, one booking.
- The stewards can only allow entry to those who have booked.
- There will be no public toilet facilities for the time being in church.
- The frequency of Masses and liturgies available is entirely dependant of the generosity of time that volunteer stewards are able to give. The more stewards the more Masses. If you would like to volunteer please contact Jennifer Pickles at jennifer.pickles@virginmedia.com

Mass

This next section deals with the requirements and conditions for celebrating the Holy Mass by both the diocesan authorities and the Bishops Conference of England and Wales. I am grateful to our Dean, Fr. Stamp at St. Anne's, for writing this down in a clear and concise way and allowing me to copy it.

- People are asked to come to church in plenty of time before Mass begins in order to make life easier for the volunteer stewards.
- As you enter church please wait at the back, social distancing, and a steward will greet you and direct you to your allocated seats. Mgr Daly has reminded us to say: 'Advise all that their 'usual seats' will not be available.'
- There will be no Sacristans, Altar Servers, Readers, Choirs, musicians or Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. The Bishops have made clear that for the celebration of Mass, no-one except the Priest is permitted inside the Sacristy, only the Priest should touch the chalice, vestments and sacred vessels, and no-one should approach the Priest while he is on the Sanctuary.
- There will be no Prayers of the Faithful (Bidding prayers).
- There will be no Sign of Peace.
- Holy Communion will be distributed by the Priest at the end of Mass instead of at the usual time. Stewards will direct parishioners, row by row, to come forward for Holy Communion, after which they will direct parishioners to leave the church via the one way system. This is in order to avoid the danger of people gathering together in the church after Mass, to relieve pressure on Stewards to police this (remember they are already kindly giving their time) and to ensure the church can be cleaned and disinfected straight after. This is the method for receiving Holy Communion recommended by the Bishop's Conference at this time.
- There will be no singing or music during Mass.

- Priests have been asked not to sign any Mass cards to discourage anyone coming into the Sacristy before or after Mass. If you would like a Mass offered, please write the priests name on the card and post the donation with the intention through the presbytery letter box.
- We have also been asked not to display any notices at the back of church except the poster with details of the Parish Safeguarding Representatives in case this causes people to 'bunch up' whilst reading or looking at notices.
- Social distancing of 2 metres will be observed by all who are not living in the same household or sharing the same social bubble. This removes the requirement for the congregation to wear masks, but anyone who wishes to wear a mask and would feel safer doing so is welcome to wear their own mask during Mass.
- There will be no access to toilets or sinks. If you require water during Mass, please bring your own bottle of water with you.

Before I give the weekday Mass times for which will be available I would ask one more thing of you all – please pray for me. This November I will have been a priest for ten years and our Lord has allowed me in that time to share and experience many miracles, countless blessings and numerous profound joys. However, I never, ever, envisaged that I would be having to put a booking system in place for Mass! This is not my way of ministry as you know and like everyone else I'm feeling very frustrated; it all feels surreal. I find myself, like all priests, in uncharted territory with no training attempting to translate masses of official dos and donts from various authoritative bodies! The Bishop emailed on Friday and wrote:

'I witnessed something of the labour intensive requirements for cleaning and stewarding when I was at the Cathedral on Sunday morning. There was an army of helpers. I appreciate that it is not at all easy for some parishes to gather the necessary help. My sense of caution about re-opening is only confirmed by reading an article in The New York Times that, having been so eager to re-open, many churches in America are now proving to be a major source for a large number of new virus victims.'

Like the Bishop, I would like to re-iterate my appreciation to all those volunteers in the parish who are helping to keep our church open as a safe place for prayer. I think we will all be glad when some normality returns, whatever normal may look like in the future. Let's keep asking for the prayers of Our Lady and Saint Joseph to help traverse this new and hopefully temporary challenge.

The Masses that will be available, thanks to the generosity of those volunteers who have come forward to help, are as follows:

Tuesday 21st July 6pm – Votive Mass of The Holy Angels
Wednesday 22nd July 10am – Saint Mary Magdalene (Memoria)
Thursday 23rd July 10am – Saint Bridget of Sweden, Patron of Europe (Feast)
Friday 24th July 6pm – Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart
Saturday 25th July – 9:30am -11am Church will be open for silent private prayer

The first two week phase of re-opening church has been for silent private prayer, the next phase will be for the re-commencing of weekday Masses. If all goes well our next future phase will be the return of weekend Masses in August. As we have all come to learn during this Covid-19 pandemic, things can change daily let alone weekly. Let's keep looking after each other and praying as always for God's help as we continue to move forward safely.

God Bless and keep praying
 Fr. O'Brien