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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 18th July 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This last week I have acquired some new companions who have been a wonderful distraction. Three House Sparrow chicks have emerged from the presbytery gardens and have decided to make the office windowsill their playground. Their game today, as I write this parish update, is to peck out the window sealant and stare, unabashedly, straight at me. I'm glad I've never watched the Hitchcock thriller 'The Birds'! As I stare back at my new feathery friends, who seem not to have a care in the world despite the Covid-19 Pandemic, I'm reminded that Our Lord also looked at these creatures and probably played with them as a child. In the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Jesus says:

'Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.' (Mt 10: 29 – 31)

In other words, if the actions of such a tiny creature can be known by God, how much more does He know and love us, His children through baptism. I have come to appreciate over these last four months the many blessings that God has given, no matter how great or small. From the genuine and sincere words of 'How are you?' to the supportive and encouraging actions of others, especially in regards to the re-opening of church. All these gifts and blessings are just simple reminders and signs of God's ever present love for us all. Maybe over these next few days we can reflect on the blessings that God has given us in our own lives and how we in turn can be a blessing for others by our words and actions.

The Bishop, in an email sent to the priests of the diocese yesterday, wrote:

'People seem to be very understanding. Most churches are now authorised for opening for private prayer and an increasing number will be open for Mass I have had no news of attempts to overcrowd beyond capacities. People also seem to be generous in attending weekday Masses rather than all aiming for Sunday. I am grateful, as I know you are, for the generosity of so many volunteers who have made the re-opening possible. May I please ask that we maintain the clear and now familiar 2 metre rule for social-distancing in church rather than complicate matters with options regarding face masks and 1 metre? This makes particular sense in the light of the fact that we are still in a relatively high "R" number zone.'

I would like to re-echo the Bishop's words of thanks to all those parishioners who have been so kind and generous in coming forward to help re-open church and make it a safe environment. People are very anxious and nervous, especially after watching the media coverage about Blackburn and Darwen this week. Please, please do not feel that you have to come to Mass if you are worried and scared. The Bishop has temporarily removed the Sunday obligation for all Roman Catholics in our diocese. Most of the measures and conditions imposed on us from the various authorities and official bodies are new and unfamiliar. These can make people fret (even parish priests!) however, they are temporary and not set in stone forever. What will the future look like? Who knows? But as my new friends, the sparrow chicks have taught me, rest easy in the peace of God and trust Him, for all things will be well. Amen.

Thanks to our volunteer stewards; because of them I am able to celebrate Mass publicly on these further dates.

Tuesday 28th July 6pm – Votive Mass of The Holy Angels

Wednesday 29th July 10am – Saint Martha (Memoria)

Thursday 30th July 10am – Votive Mass of the Most Precious Blood

Friday 31st July 6pm – Saint Ignatius of Loyola (Memoria)

Again, following government directives, Bishops Conference conditions and diocesan requirements people are asked, for the time being, to book a place for Mass. See below for more details.

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 22nd July from 5pm - 6pm or on Friday 24th 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 under the title 'Bookings'. These further new Mass dates will be added in the coming week. 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 NHS Test & 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 dependent 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 priest's 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.

God Bless and keep praying

Fr. O'Brien