

**A MESSAGE FROM FR BOB POOLE to PARISHIONERS OF ST PHILIP'S AND ST CLARE'S AND LIFT JESUS HIGHER**

**Friday March 20th**

Dear brothers and sisters,

We face another weekend without being able to gather together for Sunday and Saturday evening Masses. This is a devastating aspect of the coronavirus epidemic for those who look forward to being able to come together for worship and communion with the Lord and with each other in the parish community. How do we face this in a way that shows our faith?

Firstly, we must always remember that our first response has to be from a position of *faith*, and not *fear*. There used to be a situation comedy programme back in England, called *Dad's Army*, where one of the main characters went around constantly shouting "Don't Panic!" Yes, let's not panic. God has got this, folks. "*My times are in your hands*" says the writer of Psalm 31 (cf verse 15). The Scriptures remind us time and again that God is bigger than any threat that might come against us, from whatever source. And turning to the pages of the Bible to sustain us during this difficult time might just be one of the best things we can do right now, at a time when we are forced to spend much time at home. Jesus says to each and every one of us at this moment: "*Fear is useless. What you need is faith!*" (Mark 5:36)

And pray. God is with us always, wherever we are, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in. He is in our homes, in our hospitals, in our prisons, in care facilities, in our homeless shelters- there is nowhere that God isn't. Talk to him, feel his presence, calming, reassuring, blessing. Listen to any thoughts or ideas he might choose to place within your minds and hearts. This could become an extended time of personal retreat for you, a time to get away and just "*be still and know that I am God*" (Psalm 46: 10). Imagine - just you and God together!! I am sure that this is something that delights the heart of God. He must grieve that you and I don't seem to find enough time in the busyness of our lives to just be with him. This period of enforced quietness and rest is his opportunity, as well as ours, to form a real, strong, personal relationship between you and Him.

I am trying, as far as the restrictions allow, to keep the church open for small gatherings of people to come in and pray. So far, we have periods of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament from 2pm – 7pm on Monday and Thursday afternoons, and we are trying to extend that time to other days as well. We have bible study on Monday evenings in the church hall from 7.45pm – 9.30pm. We have Stations of the Cross on Friday evenings at 7pm. We will try to have Mass on Monday evenings in the church at 7pm still, and at the homes of parishioners of St Clare's on Tuesday evenings at 7pm, as before, since these attract only small numbers of people. The bereavement meetings on alternate Tuesdays continue – next one will be on March 24<sup>th</sup> at 2pm in the church hall of St Philip's. But this is dependent on the progress of the virus and may have to be changed.

Those who are online probably already know about various websites that offer other opportunities to feed themselves spiritually during this time. EWTN offers daily Mass on TV, as do other channels. We will try to let you know about what other services there are to enable us to sustain faith and keep moving spiritually forward. This is our time of Lent, brothers and sisters, this is our cross, we don't need to go looking for other ways of self-mortification or testing right now. This, this is our time of testing and temptation, the time to answer for ourselves the question: "*Is the Lord among us or not?*" (Exodus 17:7)

*Peace, Fr Bob*