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Monday of Third Week of Easter 2020

Dear Friends

Christ Is Risen! Alleluia!

Well it feels very much like we are on day 4127 of lockdown. I'm sure it's actually much less than this, but it certainly feels like it to me! We seem to have adapted ourselves to this new way of being Church, of accessing the Mass through the medium of the internet, of praying for each other, of keeping in touch as best we can. I have even seen and spoken in the flesh with one or two people on my allowed daily exercise (keeping to strict distancing rules of course). But we have to admit that this is very much second best, a shadow of what it is to be the Church today. This recognition can be a good thing, the Church is ever having to adapt to new ways of being as society rapidly changes around us. We have to adapt ourselves to proclaiming the unchanging message of the Church so that it can be heard by every generation anew. There have been churches that have been livestreaming their Masses for a few years now as a way of opening up the experience of the Mass to those who cannot physically get to Church to participate in it. Our neighbouring Church of St Joseph and the English Martyrs in Bishop's Stortford is a case in point, but our experience shows us that whilst it allows us to participate in some way, it is in no way a substitute for actually being at the Mass. I know am very anxious to see an end to this lockdown and get back on track with building up the Church here in this place.

I have no idea what the future holds, when the lockdown will be ended, what new challenges the Church will face when it is all ended. What seems clear is that things will not be as they were, not for the Church, not for governments, not for society. We are already looking at the world in a very different way. The things we took for granted, we now see in a different light and in a new way. Take for instance those who work in the caring professions, doctors, nurses, social care workers, basic care givers, those who work in our supermarkets and those who deliver our goods. We didn't often think of them before all of this, and when we did, it wasn't always in the best of ways. Our society used to be in thrall to the cult of celebrity and yet they don't seem to matter much any more. Society seemed to be happy with celebrities, sports stars and the like receiving millions of pounds for their services, for their unique skill

set, whilst those who we now consider as being 'on the front line' were deserving of their meagre pay. I wonder if and how this will change as we move forward?

I hope that there will be a new appreciation of a life of faith too, which before this crisis was not widely considered beyond the faithful congregations of the churches. Research shows that at the start of the outbreak the most googled word in the UK was prayer; people who hadn't thought much about God or prayer suddenly felt the need to address this issue in their lives when facing possible death. Last week we were asked to share our viewing figures for our streaming Masses over Easter and compare these numbers with our actual numbers from last year. Our numbers have been very good and represent a fairly accurate picture of where we are as a parish in terms of our numbers. Some parishes have reported increases in viewing figures that are in excess of 10 times their usual attendance, which for them is hugely encouraging, even if the accuracy of the viewing figures might be questionable. What we can possibly say is that a number of people who may not have had the courage to step foot in Church and attend Mass in person, do at least have an opportunity to 'attend' Mass and see what its all about without the problems associated with walking through the door of a Church, and this can only be a good thing.

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have difficult decisions to make in the coming weeks and months, how do they ensure the safety of their clergy and people, many of whom are in the category of the over seventies and/or have underlying medical conditions that will require continued shielding for maybe a considerable time to come, and start to open up the Churches and access to the sacraments that are so central to our being? This seems an impossible conundrum to solve yet solve it they must. I have no idea what their response might be, but we need to be ready to put into action any decisions they make.

I would like to say a huge thank you to those who responded so positively to my last letter. I am never happy talking about money, it is not a subject that interests me much, but it is of huge significance as we face the future. Thank you again for your generosity.

Deacon Des has been printing off copies of the newsletter and the priest's weekly letter and has been delivering them to those parishioners without email, WhatsApp and the internet. If you know anyone in this situation, can you let me know their details and I will try to ensure they receive these important communications on a regular basis. Thanks go again to Deacon Des for this initiative.

Until next time.

With my love and blessing

Fr Lee