



ST FRANCIS DE SALES' CHURCH

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PARISH PRIEST: FR WOJCIECH STACHYRA SCHR

WESTMINSTER DIOCESE CHARITY No 233699

PARISH OFFICE: BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

Pastoral Letter for the Fourth Sunday in Lent (Laetare Sunday) 22nd March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

You need no words from me to state the grave seriousness of the crisis of the spread of the coronavirus around the world and throughout this country. We know the steps and the sacrifices we must take in order to play our part in slowing its spread, saving lives and enabling the NHS to continue its vital work. These things are our duty before God. There are other vitally important aspects of this moment in our history that are less prominent in our media and conversations. At this moment we stand before God. That is never to be forgotten. Together we turn to God in prayer, at this moment as never before.

Our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the bedrock on which we live. Prayer is the first and loving expression of this relationship. Prayer is an acknowledgement that we are not in ultimate control of our lives or of our world. That is so clear at this time. Prayer is the recognition that our lives, individually and communally, are marked by failure and sin. Prayer is an expression of our turning to God for that grace which alone can heal us, strengthen us and give us the resolve and generosity to do all that is rightly expected of us today. Please make this a time of prayer, personally, in the family and wherever you happen to be.

The highest form of prayer is the celebration of the Holy Mass. This is at the heart of the rhythm of the life of the Church, the rhythm of prayer which sustains us all. The present crisis will not disturb that rhythm. Mass will continue to be celebrated, day by day. The prayer of the Church will continue day by day.

What will change is the manner of our participation in those celebrations of the Mass. In response to the pandemic and the official guidance, which we must follow, public participation in the celebration of the Mass is not, for now, possible. This is a sacrifice we have to make. It is not easy, for any Catholic, but it is what we must do.

I want to make it exceptionally clear that the teaching of the Church is that, in these circumstances, the obligation of attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days no longer applies. Please have no doubt about this.

This does not mean that we lose our love of the Mass or our desire to take part in the celebration of the Mass. Mass will be celebrated, day by day, in your church. There are many ways of taking part in this prayer. Associate yourself with the celebration of the Mass spiritually. Read the Scriptures of the day. Use some of the materials that are available to be close in your heart. Learn again the practice of spiritual communion. If you are helped by a visual participation in the Mass, then go to one of the websites on which that celebration is being streamed. The list of those websites is available to you.

There are many ways in which we can deepen our participation in the Mass and our life of prayer in these strange and stressful days. Indeed, they are an opportunity for us to do so.

Two other points.

Being unable to attend Mass is the experience of many, many Catholics around the world. They are deprived of the Mass through distance, or through violence, or through persecution. We can unite our experience with them and, like them, return to the Mass with fresh love and enthusiasm when, again, it is possible for us to do so, in bigger numbers than ever.

Secondly, you understand well that from our prayer, and from the prayer of the Mass, flows the love and compassion which we want to show to those around us who are in need. Jesus gives Himself entirely for us in His sacrifice, the sacrifice made present again for us in every Holy Mass. What we receive from Him we offer to others. So please do look out for every way in which you can help those in need around you. Thank you.

We know that this time of crisis is not going to be brief. We are involved in a lengthy battle. We encourage each other. We pray for each other. Together we turn to Mary for her special protection, especially on 29 March when again, in keeping with our ancient tradition, we offer ourselves and our country to her, as our gift, and seeking her protection.

Mary, Mother of Jesus, pray for us

Mary, Mother of Sorrows, pray for us

Mary, Mother of Joys, pray for us.

Amen.

Yours devotedly, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster

PS, I was given this prayer a few days ago. It touched me deeply. It is a prayer for our times.

Dear Guardian Angel, go for me to the church, there kneel down at Mass for me. At the Offertory, take me to God, and offer Him my service: What I am, what I have, offer as my gift. At the Consecration, with your seraphic strength, adore my Saviour truly present, praying for those who have loved me, for those who have offended me, and for those now deceased, that the blood of Jesus may purify them all. During Holy Communion, bring to me the Body and Blood of Jesus uniting Him with me in spirit, so that my heart may become His dwelling place. Plead with Him, that through His sacrifice all people throughout the world may be saved. When the Mass ends, bring home to me and to every home, the Lord's blessing. Amen.

We are still surrounded by the angels and by the saints who are glorifying God and protecting and assisting mankind. Why should we not make them our particular friends and allies in situations where we are touching limits that we cannot overcome?

Dear Parishioners,

In these troubled and anxious times Father and the PPC will use email, the parish website (www.stfrancisdesales.co.uk) and the weekly bulletin, which we hope to make available at the church on Sundays and on the website, to try to keep you informed on the latest advice we have from church leaders and about the measures we are taking as a parish to retain a measure of spiritual communion.

We do understand however that not everyone has access to email and, according to our own advice, not everyone will be able to come to church. So, we would ask those who do receive these messages to please share them, by whatever means you safely can, with others who might otherwise lose contact with the church.

For the time being we hope to continue to open the church on Sunday mornings for private worship and devotions but we would ask parishioners that do come to please take every precaution for their own and others' safety.

No over 70s or other vulnerable or at-risk groups should come to church at all.

Please do not come to church if you have a high temperature, a persistent cough, or any other cold and flu symptoms.

Please follow the guidelines on social distancing and keep a safe distance apart in the pews (approximately 2 metres).

If at all possible please wear gloves. We will try to make these available at the entry to the church.

Please take bulletins from the basket and do not pass these around or return to the basket. Take them home and do not pass on to others but please share the messages orally or by phone or messaging.

At this time, we do not have plans to open the church other than on Sundays but we will follow advice and best practice on this and let you know if this changes.

Thank you to those who continue to support the church through their standing orders, also to those who have expressed a desire to continue their loose or envelope donations. You are welcome to place these in the red posting box at the entrance to the nave.

We are considering setting up a network of "prayer buddies" to support those who are missing our regular communal worship.

We hope to give you more information on this soon. In the meantime, if you would like to volunteer to take part please let Peter know at peterstuart@blueyonder.co.uk

If you are in urgent need of a priest please contact Father on the church number, ideally before going to the presbytery. For hospital visits please contact the appropriate hospital chaplaincy.

Details on the live streaming of masses along with the Cardinal's message are available elsewhere in the bulletin.

Let us all remember in our prayers all those who are suffering in any way as a result of the virus and pray that Our Merciful Father leads us out of this time of trouble.

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic and following official advice, from Friday 20 th March 2020, our church will be closed for all public acts of worship. This will continue until further notice. The church is open for visits and private prayer on Sunday from 9 am till 12 noon.
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Churches in the area opening times:
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St Theodore of Canterbury - 110 Station Road; Hampton-on-Thames; TW12 2AS
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Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 am till 10.15 am; Saturdays from 6.30 pm till 7 pm Sundays from 9 am till 11 am.
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St James' - 61 Pope's Grove; Twickenham; TW1 4JZ

Most of the weekdays from 9 am to 5 pm
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The Sacred Heart - 262 Kingston Road; Teddington; TW11 9JQ

Most of the weekdays

St Edmund of Canterbury - 213 Nelson Road; Whitton; TW2 7BB
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Most of the weekdays

Please practice social distancing as much as possible when using the church.
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MASS ONLINE: www.churchservices.tv

OTHER WEBSITES

There are many websites offering information and support at this time. Among them are:

The Diocese of Westminster: rcdow.org.uk

The Bishops' Conference: cbcew.org.uk

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham
walsingham.org.uk

Lent in Isolation: lentinisolation.com

