

## ***Dear parishioner***

I hope and pray you and your family are well and that you're coping with with the emotional, financial and spiritual challenges of 'lockdown'.

It's hard to believe that only 6 weeks ago we welcomed Bishop Philip to our parish and enjoyed such a wonderful celebration of our faith community.

How could phrases like 'social distancing' and 'self isolating' become such a part of our every day vocabulary so quickly?

Even a month ago, being unable meet or embrace our loved ones - or even to come to church to pray, or to receive the sacraments - seemed unthinkable.

We have travelled far in the last 4 weeks.

Thankfully, I am now fully restored to health and able resume my pastoral and spiritual care for you all as your parish priest.

I have also been working with many of our parish team leaders to discover how best to serve and reach out to you all during this difficult time.

### **LIVE STREAMING OF MASS AND OTHER SERVICES**

Last week, we experienced a Holy Week, Sacred Triduum and Easter Sunday celebration like no other.

It has certainly been both strange and challenging celebrating the liturgies in an empty church.

But it has also been a time of grace, a time of experiencing the Lord in a new way, of opening up to the wonder of God's providence in the form of technology. Many of us have been compelled to step out of our comfort zone, and to embrace the opportunities presented by virtual communication so as to find new ways of connecting and being 'Church'.

I know many of you have been able to join me in the celebration of Mass through the medium of live streaming.

Despite technological difficulties, this has proved a tremendous blessing and enabled us not only to share our customary Masses and services, but some new ones too.

***If you haven't yet managed to connect with these services, you can do so through the YouTube app on your computer, tablet, ipad, smart phone or smart tv and search for 'English Martyrs Reading Live'.***

After you've done it once it becomes much easier as the correct page will usually pop up to the top of the screen as soon as you click on YouTube. So next week, Mass will continue 7pm Monday-Saturday and 10am on Sunday. There will be the daily Office of Readings, Adoration and Morning Prayer at 9am Monday-Friday and 11am on Saturday and Night Prayer at 9pm daily, all led by me (Fr Michael) on the live stream (English Martyrs Reading Live on YouTube).

Details of what is being live streamed are posted on our parish website [www.englishmartyrsrdg.org.uk/](http://www.englishmartyrsrdg.org.uk/)

The website is our key means of communicating what is happening in the parish, so I encourage you to check in often so you don't miss out.

I would also like to draw your attention to some of the other content on the parish website.

### **PARISH WEBSITE**

**Parish Registration.** This can be done online by simply clicking on the button and filling it in. It can then be submitted online. A form should be completed by each adult in the household but details of children only needs to be completed by one person. And if you are also able to complete a form for any relatives who do not have internet access, that would be very helpful. You will need to fill in an email address for them, so you can either use your own or enter the parish email address [englishmartyrs@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:englishmartyrs@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk).

**If you have not already registered THIS YEAR it would be a great help if you could complete this registration form - assuming you would like to receive information and updates from your parish priest and/or the parish.**

**If in doubt PLEASE COMPLETE ANOTHER FORM.**

**Parish newsletter.** This has long been a key means of communicating within our parish. So despite most not having access to a physical copy, the newsletter is still being produced and published on the website. And if you would like it to be emailed to you weekly, please just fill in the form on the website and this will be done (a copy of this week's newsletter is attached to this email). If you haven't read the newsletter in the past few weeks, you'll find that these issues also contain details of how to either help fellow parishioners or access support if needed.

**Parish finances.** I am painfully aware that, for many of you, the social distancing measures have had a negative impact on your financial circumstances, so even paying for housing and food may be a cause of concern for you. I certainly don't intend to add to that anxiety, so if money is tight for you then please ignore what I'm about to say. But most of our parish income, which pays for our utilities, building maintenance, IT provision, council tax etc, comes from your Sunday Mass offerings.

At English Martyrs a high proportion of that is in cash, so with no Sunday Mass we have very limited income. The diocese has tried to mitigate the loss in by 'furloughing' all the diocesan staff - including Barbara, our parish secretary (which means they are not working for us at the moment, but the Government is paying 80% of their wages). But we are still struggling to pay the bills, so if you are in a position to make a donation it would be appreciated. You can do so by clicking 'DONATE' on the website. We hope soon to also include a 'DONATE' button on the parish YouTube account.

**Mass, prayer and Spiritual Connection.** There are now numerous opportunities to pray and meet together online - so welcome to our new online **English Martyrs Calendar** <https://www.englishmartyrsrdg.org.uk/calendar> Click/copy and paste on the link to go straight to it or access via the parish website under 'Calendar'.

Whether it's Mass, prayer, faith formation, child or youth activities, all you have to do is click on the calendar and you'll be taken directly to the live stream or to the online Zoom meeting or details of how to access a Team meeting. We now have more chances to meet, to grow in faith and to pray together than we ever did before.

Monday - Friday at 11am there is a regular 'Spiritual Connection' slot, with different opportunities for prayer and growth led by different people, in addition to Journey in Faith and our Emmaus groups.

Our youth groups, 'Elevate' and Glow' are continuing to meet online and we even have a Saturday morning 'hangout' for our under 18's.

No one is expected to do everything, but I hope you are all beginning to feel there may be something for you. If not, then please reply to this email and let me know and I'll see what we can do.

But please check out the calendar, which is updated regularly, with new opportunities being added all the time.

## **PRACTICAL AND PASTORAL SUPPORT**

I know that this lockdown period has generated significant pressures and strains on many of you. Some of you will be worried about money, food or shopping; some of you may be anxious about elderly loved ones; some of you will know people who have become sick and possibly someone who has died. Anxiety, sadness, grief and suffering do not become less personal just because it seems to be everywhere.

But amongst so much suffering we also see the presence of God in the outpouring of care and concern for each other, - through healthcare and other key workers and also in charitable neighbourliness.

So please ask if you need help. We have parishioners willing and able to do shopping or run errands, or available on the phone if you just need to talk.

James Lewis, the seminarian working with us at present, is happy to listen, to talk and to pray with you on the phone.

And whilst we are all having to cope without the grace of the sacraments at the moment, there are provisions in the case of **urgent need**, so I may be able to help.

### **Ministry to the dying**

Please God it won't happen, but remember - if you or a loved one should find yourself in hospital in urgent need of a priest, it may still be possible for a Catholic priest to come to the hospital to minister to the dying. There is a team of 4 Catholic priests willing and able to minister to the dying.

Through their generosity, and with all the appropriate PPE, it is to be hoped that no Catholic patient at the RBH will die without being fortified by the rites of the Church. Next of kin should make contact either via the hospital switchboard or through the parish priest.

If you have any questions or suggestions, or if you would like to access or offer some support, please contact **emartyrsreading@gmail.com**

I wish you all the blessings of Easter. We look forward in hope, beyond suffering and death, to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Amen

