

Fr James' homily for this Sunday (Readings for 13th Sunday of the Year)

First Reading: Second Book of Kings 4:8-16
Second Reading: Romans 6: 3-11
Gospel: Matthew 10:37 – 42



For the readings for the Solemnity of SS Peter and Paul, see [Here](#)

Make a plan to come back to Mass

Today, rather than take my lead from the scriptures for this Sunday, rich and challenging though they are, I want to say something directly about our current challenge to work together as a parish to make participation in Holy Mass available to all of us safely in what we must remember is still an emergency situation.

First, what is the challenge? Very simply, in order to allow as many as possible to participate in Mass, not necessarily on Sunday but at some point in the week, we need a significant number of volunteers to be available to regulate the numbers coming safely in and out of the churches, and to keep the church clean. We're going to have to keep this system going for weeks and months, so the more volunteers, the easier it is. It is a bit of an awkward job, but it is the difference between having Mass or not. *The scriptures today all in some way touch on the gift of self, and that in making that sacrificial gift of ourselves we find a greater self (of which the sacrifice of Christ and his resurrection is the epitome.)*

Please read the information on the website to see if and how you can be part of meeting this challenge. Please don't leave it to others, who might leave it to you!

Secondly, what is the opportunity? Again, put simply, we have the opportunity in this extraordinary situation to enter into the meaning and the reality of the mystery of the Mass in a renewed way - a gift to treasure for the rest of our lives. A chance to become aware of the holy ground on which we walk. A chance to meet with Jesus and be changed by him in a renewed and life-transforming way.

Holy Mass is the centre of our religious life and the privileged place of encounter with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The "source and summit" of the Christian life as the Second Vatican Council teaches. Our separation from Mass in this time of pandemic conditions has had profound effects in many many lives. But let us look to the positive (there's a novel idea from Fr J!!) This time has maybe spoken to you, even in a way not yet formed into thoughts and words, about how important Mass is. We know that English Catholics, and Catholics of other nationalities in different times and ways, have been separated from Mass. For reasons of economic or political

trouble, this is the case for many around the world much of the time. To celebrate Mass was, for hundreds of years, illegal in England! Our forebears treasured this fragile but all-powerful rite during these times, and were the stronger for it. We can be too. I emphasise that I mean separation from Mass, from hearing the Word, from offering prayers and sacrifice. Alongside this is separation from the gift of Holy Communion. That is another and different privation, and gives us a different opportunity.

How can we use the opportunity?

First, come back to church to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. A renewed understanding of the value of our prayer, and of the living presence of Christ in the Tabernacle, of a little 10 minutes or so given to God in this way, will prepare us well for when we have the chance to be part of Mass which, because of social-distance capacity in church, may not be so often. Bring in prayer those who are shielded or fearful of leaving home. At home, prayerfully read the Mass readings and offer intentions of prayer. Here are some links to help pray in church: [Archbishop John Wilson](#) and [Eucharistic Adoration](#)

Secondly, renew your understanding of the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

For the time being, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended, as social distancing and other safety precautions make it impossible to make Mass available to all. (In normal times, of course, there are those for whom there is no obligation if it is beyond their power to fulfil it.)

Ask yourself, do you understand why that obligation is there in the first place? ([See the Catholic Catechism](#)) Like all “rules” of the faith, it is there to guide us to what we need. Like we need to eat well and regularly, like we need to sleep, so to we need to be part of the living worship of God as Jesus taught us to be, in order to grow in his image and be able to say “yes” to him. The culture that says “I’ll show up to Mass when it suits me” and all that goes with that mind-set, is profoundly damaging to our spirit, profoundly sinful.

As we have undergone a time of enforced separation from Mass, let us use that experience now to understand why we have an obligation. What to do?

- First: Make a sacrifice. Make it possible for others to come to Mass: answer the call of your parish to steward the building so that Mass can be said in public. It’s a sacrifice on your part, but because you are doing it, others will and so you can come to Mass.
- Secondly: Once a schedule of public Mass can be established, come at some point in the week. It doesn’t have to be Sunday. It may not be possible to be Sunday. But whenever it is, treasure the opportunity and bring your prayers and intentions to the altar with a new understanding of your importance!!

Thirdly, prepare to be able to receive Holy Communion. There's no two ways about this. To be able to receive Holy Communion worthily we must have some practice of sacramental Reconciliation. As a church we have often overlooked this truth for years. I realise it is not necessarily the most helpful thing for me to say so directly - but we have to start somewhere! The *Precepts of the Church* reduce it to a clinical minimum, saying that as we must, for our good, be in a position to receive Holy Communion once a year at least, therefore we must come to Reconciliation at least once a year. ([See here](#)) This came unofficially formalised in what people call their "Easter duties" and that's always meant Reconciliation as a nasty chore to get out of the way.

If only we could use this time to get rid of that idea, as well as getting rid of the casualness with which Holy Communion is often received as though it is ours by right regardless of where we are at in spirit. A regular and life-giving practice of Confession (like a cool drink on a hot day) is what Jesus intends for you - because you need it. Yes, it is hard work in a way - anything worthwhile is. My advice is to put off coming to Holy Communion until you can say a true Amen. St Augustine reflected 1500 years ago that when the priest says "the Body of Christ" at the invitation to Holy Communion, we reply "Amen" to mean that our lives assent to the reign of Jesus in us and all the teaching of the faith. Holy Communion is not, in the first place, a private thing, but something that shows we give up our independence to be part of something more rich and wonderful. As Jesus says in today's Gospel **"anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it."**

This may come as a challenge, but it is a wonderful one. Your priests will always help to guide you to grow in the use of Reconciliation, from whatever point you are starting. It is one of the principal joys of being a priest.

So that's it for today, as we face a new chapter in parish life and new and very real challenges. Jesus makes us feel uncomfortable in the Gospel today, challenging us to prefer nothing at all in the world to him. I pray that our individual plan to come back to Mass will be a very real and practical way of making that Gospel our own.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.