3rd Sunday of Lent, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

As we all are very well aware, these are turbulent times in our nation and in our community. There is much uncertainty and much anxiety. It is entirely possible that we will shortly experience more significant restrictions on our daily activities, perhaps even of the sort that have been seen in other countries. Naturally, there are many people are worried and are anxious. I hope that what follows will re-assure everyone in our Parish community.

**Prayer:**

We are a community of Faith, not just a ‘Faith-Community’. This means we trust in God, and we have the courage to bring our needs to Him, and to pray for all our brothers and sisters who are ill, or who are anxious or afraid.

From this weekend, therefore, it is my intention to **Expose the Blessed Sacrament in our Church on the Altar throughout the day each day.** This will commence from 8am on Sunday Morning, and will cease only during Masses and other services. This will not be as formal an arrangement as our annual Quarant’ore, however any parishioner who wishes to volunteer to spend time in the Church during the day will be greatly encouraged. When the Church is empty the street-doors will be open, but the glass-panel doors will remain locked to ensure security is maintained.

Should a group of parishioners wish to gather regularly (even daily) in the Church to pray the Rosary, this will be actively encouraged. One suggestion is that we do this after each Mass during the week, where other events do not make this impractical.

**Confessions:**

Perhaps recent events have caused you or someone you know some anxiety or concern that may be assisted by Sacramental Confession? This is a valuable moment to discuss these matters, especially during Lent, when we seek to return trustingly to God’s Mercy. From this week, **Confessions will be heard from 30 minutes before every Mass**, and will be available at other times, as advertised.

**Precautions**

If you are experiencing any symptoms of illness, such as coughs and colds, please do not attend Mass, in order not to pass illness on to other people. Your Sunday obligation is lifted in these circumstances. For your information: one of our neighbours, **St Luke’s in Pinner now has their 6pm Saturday and 11am Sunday Masses streamed online.**

Here at St Matthews, the following precautions have already been taken, and we ask that our whole community and visitors to the Church cooperate to ensure that we keep everyone as safe as possible:

* Holy Water Stoups have been emptied.
* Please make use of the sanitiser Gel that is near the entrance to the Church
* We will not distribute Holy Communion from the Chalice at Mass for the foreseeable future.
* Please refrain from shaking hands at the Sign of Peace, and consider employing some other gesture that expresses our shared-peace, which has been won through Christ who is Sacramentally present on the Altar at this moment of the Mass.
* Please receive Holy Communion only in your hand. Please present your hands *reverently* to receive The Lord, as if they were a throne for him (an image that St Augustine uses). This precaution is because of the risk of saliva carrying viruses, as the health-experts tell us. As a Catholic, the Law of the Church gives all Communicants the right to receive The Lord on their Tongue, however Canon Law also urges us not to act against the Common Good. If this is a concern for any parishioner, please approach Fr Brian for advice or help.

In addition:

* Hymn books and missals have been removed, in order to prevent germs spreading from commonly-handled items.
* Please take a newsletter home, and we ask that you do not recycle them into the tray at the door, for the same reasons.
* The collection-plate will not be passed around the Church. There will instead be one basket in front of the Altar for you to make your offering as you see fit.
* Door-handles and other frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned and dis-infected regularly.

We know that Government guidelines are being updated regularly. If public gatherings are cancelled or restricted over the coming days or weeks this will have an effect on Churches, however we do not yet know what this will be. We are very conscious that that the Easter Festivities are approaching. It is entirely possible that these may be disrupted. Please keep an eye on our website for more information about Masses and Services at St Matthews.

**Community and outreach:**

It is very important that we maintain a healthy attitude to events that concern us, and that we work hard to re-assure each other and that we look out for those most vulnerable.

As a diverse and active Christian community, our ability to assist others is great indeed, if we work together. There may well be opportunities for volunteers to come together to assist in various ways. Some suggestions are that perhaps we may be able to assist with food-delivery to people who find themselves isolated, or to maintain telephone contact. Anyone who wishes to register to help out in whatever ways might be needed, please leave your contact details with Fr Brian at the Masses this weekend. Likewise, if you know anyone who may be vulnerable or who are in need of support that we may be able to offer, please pass these names to Fr Brian.

The biggest service that we can provide to each other, is the service of re-assurance and cheerfulness. We may not share the Sign of Peace physically at present, however we can make an effort to extend that peace to everyone we meet through smiles, re-assuring words, and especially our prayers.

As the current situation continues to unfold, please remain calm and follow the guidance that we are all offered. Let us pray for one another, and for our whole community, bearing witness to our faith and trusting in God.

May Our Lady of Lourdes, whom we honour as Help of Christians, and patroness of the sick, pray for us all in these days and may the prayers of our Patron St Matthew sustain us in the love and service of God, and of one another.

With every blessing to you all,

 *Fr Brian*