

St Teresa & St John Southworth Churches, Cleveleys

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In this week when now all our churches are closed, please know that a private Mass is still being said each day in support of everyone in our parish communities, and in our world at this time of crisis.

There is new information coming out all the time from the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. On their website, www.ebcew.org.uk, under the heading 'Coronavirus' you will find resources and information, including a video of Cardinal Vincent Nichols speaking about the necessary closure of churches, and of the positive advantages of now using on-line broadcasts of Masses and Services which you can follow and take part in, albeit from a distance!

There is a convenient way of first accessing some of these in the UK by going on the website churchservices.tv, and clicking on CHURCHES. You will see several options from different parts of the country. For example click on St. Mary's, Brownedge (which is Bamber Bridge) in the Lancashire section, or simply google St. Mary's R. C. Church, Brownedge, and choose the main website, and you will find all the times when Masses are broadcast each day : Mon-Sat 9.10 am, Saturday evening Vigil Mass at 7 pm, and on Sunday, 9.30 am, 11 am and 6.30pm, with Exposition at 4 pm.

Within our own Diocese, and for the Diocese, there is Mass broadcast on line each day from Workington. Google : Our Lady Star of the Sea and St. Michael's, Workington and pick www.mcnmedia.tv

A very big 'thank you' for all the acts of kindness and neighbourly care which are going on in our local community, in many different ways, even if it's just checking on a neighbour who lives next door. But please remember - our appreciation of the NHS and Care workers should not just be shown by clapping for them on our streets, however moving that is, but by rigidly following the instructions to stay at home, keep a social distance, and SO save lives. Hand-washing alone is now not enough, and never was!

5th Week of Lent

A reflection on the Sunday readings

Lead us not into our expectations

If Marx did believe that religion is the opiate of the masses, he knew very little about scripture and how God works with us, or perhaps he was observing how many Christians basically want a God who will 'fix' things for them and the world rather than one who invites them deeper into relationship with him.

Ezekiel 37:12-14 is an example, with God promising to raise people from their graves and to lead them back to Israel. The passage is the interpretation of the "dry bones" vision in which the bones are given flesh, i.e. are alive, but say "Our bones are dry, our hope has gone; we are done for" (v11), which summarises their sense of desolation and the futility of life in exile. I'm sure they are also feeling "We've blown it. God wants nothing to do with us, and it's our own fault." - Chapter 36 is clear that they have abandoned God, and 34 is clear that the leaders are a sorry bunch. God, however, hasn't abandoned them. "I will cleanse you... I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (36:29). The cleansing isn't easy – it's exile – but it's a period of learning, after which he will lead them back to Jerusalem. They won't go back to life as it was, though; now, with his spirit is in them; they will know that he is their God and they are his people. The raising of Lazarus, (John 11:1-45) could also be read as an 'opiate', telling us not to worry about death, or that Jesus will always put things right for his friends, but try reading it from

Martha or Mary's point of view! They send an urgent message to Jesus, whose reaction is to wait around for two days. Meanwhile, they have to watch Lazarus deteriorate and die, wondering why Jesus hasn't come, why he hasn't answered their call. (It's reasonable to assume that the messenger returns to tell them that he has given the message to Jesus.) It's not that he hasn't bothered or is too busy: Jesus waits until he knows that Lazarus is dead—and he says he is glad! This is an opportunity for his friends to learn, to go deeper into the relationship with God. All very well, but was it fair for him to put his friends through so much? We must not gloss over the pain, confusion and despair (and anger?) which is being voiced in the sisters' "If you had been here, he would not have died".

If he had hurried to keep Lazarus alive, Lazarus and his sisters would know how kind Jesus was, and that he was a great healer, but they already know that. Now they – and the mourners – learn who Jesus is: 'I am the resurrection' is an extraordinary claim, one that Pharisees would find blasphemous because he is saying that he is God, (who is the only one who has the power to bring life to the dead).

When St. Paul teaches that the body cut off from God (by sin) is dead (Romans 8:8-11), he is clearly not talking about physical death. Equally, therefore, when he talks about our mortal bodies being given life by the Spirit living in us, he is talking about a new life – one in which we know God through the Spirit living in us, the same Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead. The Resurrection of Lazarus, is a decisive point that leads to the cross (many believed, but some went to the Pharisees) which is where God's glory is revealed in Jesus, and how Jesus he opens up the new relationship in the resurrection. He invites us on the same road. He makes the journey possible – he doesn't 'beam us aboard'. Anyone looking for a comfortable, soothing religion will need to look elsewhere.

Martin Bennett

Monday (Thomas Merton)

If we could let go of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear his call and follow him in his mysterious cosmic dance. The more we analyse the phenomena of life into strange finalities the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity and despair. But we are in the midst of this cosmic dance, and it is in the midst of us. We are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the wind and join in the general dance.

Scripture (John 11:35-45)

Jesus wept. The Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man. Could he not have prevented this man's death?' Sighing again, Jesus reached the tomb and said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha said to him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day since he died.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' So they took the stone away. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: 'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I knew that you hear me always, but I speak for the sake of all these who are standing around me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.' When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out. Many of the Jews who had seen what he did believed in him.

Tuesday (Martin Luther King)

Every time I look at the cross I am reminded of the greatness of God and the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. Somehow I can never turn my eyes from that cross without also realising that it symbolizes a strange mixture of greatness and smallness, of good and evil. As I behold that uplifted cross I am reminded not only of the unlimited power of God, but also of the sordid weakness of man. I think not only of radiance of the divine, but also of the tang of the human. I am reminded not only of Christ at his best, but of man at his worst. We must see the cross as the magnificent symbol of love conquering hate and of light overcoming darkness.

Scripture (Psalm 118: 1,5-6,13-17)

Give thanks to Yahweh for he is good, for his faithful love endures for ever. In my distress I called to Yahweh, he heard me and brought me relief. With Yahweh on my side I fear nothing. I was pushed hard, to make me fall, but Yahweh came to my help. Yahweh is my strength and my song, he has been my Saviour. Shouts of joy and salvation in the tents of the upright, 'Yahweh's right hand is triumphant, Yahweh's right hand is victorious, Yahweh's right hand is triumphant!' I shall not die, I shall live to recount the great deeds of Yahweh.

Wednesday (A New Catechism)

The disciples who accompany him along the road are still full of hopes of seeing the prophecies being fulfilled in an earthly way. At the climax of his task, at the very moment he brings God's

kingdom to God's city, the sin of mankind strikes him down. The struggle which he has waged with the weapons of preaching, healing and exorcism becomes a duel to the death. How does Jesus fight this duel? By responding resolutely to his call, his Father's will, in obedience and love. He knows that out of his death, the Father can bring the kingdom of God in power, like the wheat from the grain that falls to the earth and dies.

Scripture (Colossians 1: 9,11-13,18)

That is why we have never failed to remember you in our prayers and ask that through perfect wisdom and spiritual understanding you should reach the fullest knowledge of his will and so be able to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fortified, in accordance with his glorious strength, with all power always to persevere and endure, giving thanks to the Father who has made you able to inherit the light. He has rescued us from the darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that he loves. He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he should be supreme in every way.

Thursday (Cardinal Newman)

Jesus hung for three hours. Then all was finished, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. The holiest is dead and departed. The most tender, the most affectionate, the holiest of the sons of men is gone. Jesus is dead, and with his death my sin shall die. Sin shall no more have dominion over me. Into God's hands I put myself, not by halves, but unreservedly.

Scripture (Romans 4:17-21)

Abraham is our Father in the eyes of God, in whom he put his faith, and who brings the dead to life and calls into existence what does not yet exist. Though there seemed no hope, he hoped and believed that he was to become the father of many nations in fulfilment of the promise. Even the thought that his body was as good as dead and that Sarah's womb was dead too did not shake his faith. Counting on the promise of God, he did not doubt or disbelieve, but drew strength from faith and gave glory to God, fully convinced that whatever God promised, he has the power to perform.

Friday (Edith Stein)

Only children of grace can in fact be bearers of Christ's cross. To suffer and to be happy although suffering, to have one's feet on the earth and yet to be enthroned with Christ at the Father's right hand, to laugh and cry with the children of this world and ceaselessly sing the praises of God –this is the life of the Christian until the morning of eternity breaks forth.

Scripture (2 Cor. 4:7-11)

We hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of power is God's and not our own. We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out, but we never despair; knocked down, but still have some life in us. Always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our body. Indeed, while we are still alive, we are continually being handed over to death, for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our mortal flesh.