



Castleford Team Parish

03 April 2021

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Dear Friends

Re: Pastoral Letter (5) from the Rector - Easter

Alleluia! He is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

A happy and blessed Easter to each and every one of you; your family, friends and neighbours also.

Well, the lighter evenings are here – thanks, in part, to the clocks going forward, the birds wake us with the beauty of the dawn chorus, flowers are blossoming everywhere and, having just had three warm and beautiful days of sunshine, that's summer over with for another year (only joking – I hope!).

If you add to all this the fact that we appear, at least for the present, to be emerging successfully from the pandemic at the same time, then for me never has an easter been filled with such hope and expectation; never have those easter themes been so immediate and apparent as we, as Christians, look around at our community and country. Darkness is turning to light, sadness to hope and joy, the sense of oppression that comes from the necessary restrictions on our freedoms to a sense of release. As we pray and read scripture each day, we can see how the arrest of our Lord, his betrayal, denial, oppression, death...and then in the darkest moment of desolation his bursting forth from the tomb, can metaphorically be related to all that is going on around us. A message we all need right now, not least those of us struggling. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. Indeed!

But today, as I write this, France has gone into another national lockdown and we are reminded that for many in the world things are not going as smoothly. This concerns us because we are called to care for all creation and, as the experts remind us, we are not safe until everyone is safe and protected. So, whilst we are bursting to get back to the new normal, we temper our enthusiasm with caution and our return to church must be the same. So, take your time, do what feels right for you and please, please, please don't feel guilty if it takes a while – be gracious to yourself always and, if you are already back at church, be gracious to those who are not. Remember there are some that have lost loved ones, experienced trauma, not seen the wider world for over a year, who those who are struggling with the spectre of anxiety and depression and. I mean, let's be honest, we're all cheesed off and exhausted by the whole affair. So, watch out for yourself and for each other! After all, what we do for the least we do for Christ.

As we look to the future, I would like to take this opportunity to share a piece of wisdom from Bishop Nick's letter to his clergy this week. He notes that it is to such times as this that we have been ordained and the church called into being. After the crucifixion people were scared, anxious, lost and unsure of the future – much like many in Castleford right now. Those around Jesus only experienced the release from these feelings, the freedom, hope and joy of the resurrection after Jesus first asked them what was wrong, then they gave voice to the concerns to Jesus by telling their story, and then the risen Christ appeared to them; think, for example of the women at the tomb and the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

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Jesus' question about what troubled them, the death of their friend and saviour, which everyone was taking about, may have been obvious, made him seem ignorant and out of touch at first, but as they conversed with him his presence then, and through it all, was brought before their eyes. As we emerge from lockdown, we need to consider how we might allow ourselves and others to give voice to our shared stories and those personal to each of us, so that God can become visible in the midst of us and convert the crucifixions of our lives into resurrections. Therefore, I want to ask you to pray on this and let me have any suggestions you might have as to how we might achieve that. But in the meantime, I offer you my time so that, should you wish to, you can voice your story and your concerns to me and that we may pray our Lord's grace over them. This may have to be over the phone, by email or text and present, but as lockdown lifts it will be as my ministry was always destined to be, it will be as we meet face to face and journey together; a moment I long for, more than you know! I look forward to hearing from you.

On a similar theme, having trod water for a year, our bishops are urging us to consider what our church will look like in the future. I will be asking the PCC to take a long, and honest, look at the past, present and the future and consider what we need to lose, keep and start as far as worship and ministry is concerned. If you have any suggestions, please feed them through your PCC reps.

Update on Services and Events

By way of update on services: we are currently holding Sunday Mass at both the parish church and St Michael's, at the usual times. From week beginning Monday 12th April all mid-week services and the parish office will resume. This means the service pattern will be:

Tuesdays at 6.30pm	Mid-week Mass at Parish Church
Wednesdays at 6.30pm	Mid-week Mass at St Michael's Church
Saturdays at 9.30am	Mass for the Blessed Virgin Mary at Parish Church
Saturdays between 10 – 11am	Parish Office at Parish Church
Sundays at 9.30am	Mass at Parish Church (also streamed on-line)
Sundays at 11am	Mass at St Michael's Church
Monday to Friday at 9.30am	Morning Prayer continues via Zoom.

I continue to conduct funerals as and when they are requested, at both churches, and planning for weddings and baptisms are currently underway. I am also in conversation with the 'Churches Together in Castleford' group to explore the possibility of putting on an event/s to allow the community of Castleford to come together to mourn the past year and give thanks for the future; I will let you have more information as and when I have it. I will of course be in contact again before the full lifting of lockdown anyway, so as to keep you fully informed of what is happening socially and spiritually within our own benefice.

Please note that this year's APCM will be taking place in the Parish Church 6.30pm on 21st April 2021.

As far as resources are concerned: I continue to draw your attention to both the diocesan (<https://learning.leeds.anglican.org>) and Church of England websites (www.churchofengland.org) where you will find a wealth of resources for mind, body and spirit.

So, as I say in all my letters to you, it only remains for me to thank you for all your continued support and assure you of my prayers. Please stay safe and I look forward to us all being together soon, whenever and wherever that may be!

God bless and all my love, your brother in Christ, Fr Keith Freeman, Team Rector.

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