

ST ALBAN'S R.C. PARISH

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Deo vero ac vivo

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25th March, 2020

Dear Parish Friends,

Greetings to all of you during these strange and alarming times. It has taken me a while to process in my mind the fast pace of current events; I am sure it has been the same for you.

Even and especially at this moment we must continue to have hope in the Lord and trust in His merciful love which knows no end. With this in mind, I am deliberately writing this letter to you on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord in order to offer a way forward in hope for our parish based on the fruits of this event.

Put simply, the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary was the day on which Our Lady conceived the Word of God in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to fathom the depths of joy in the Spirit which Mary had, after her initial shock at what the Angel had to say to her! For nine whole months from today, He who was to be named Jesus grew in her womb. Every day of those intervening months, Mary would have pondered in her heart what the Angel had announced: that he would be an eternal King, and Son of the Most High. How much she must have longed actually to set eyes on Him when she at last gave birth on that original Christmas night!

So, the Annunciation looks forward over a period of nine months from today (25th March) to Christmas Day (25th December). In that period, Mary grows in faith and in hope, and the baby grows within her, and she is also saturated with the presence of the Holy Spirit. In spite of her new condition, she reaches out to those in need, as she does in visiting her mature pregnant cousin Elisabeth.

I invite you as a Parish consciously to dedicate these coming nine months to being especially in Mary's company, as a way forward in carrying spiritually hope in our hearts which Mary literally carried in her womb. Let us hope that, come December, this terrible pandemic with all the tragedy and suffering it is bringing, will have become largely a past event. Many of these nine months may well continue to be lived in social isolation. Be that the case, let us ask Mary to help us to become ever more aware that in Christ's presence we live and move and have our being. As our ordinary lives are silenced, may we be more open to hearing His voice speaking in the depths of our being! Over this period, while being very careful in obeying all the advice of those who have our bodily wellbeing in mind, let us, like Mary, seek out those around us particularly in need. It would have been far better had this virus never struck. But with God's grace, we can use this period to grow in faith and hope, in union with Our Blessed Mother.

By way of uniting spiritually together in this endeavour, I propose that with effect from this coming Saturday, 28th March, we pause wherever we are at 6pm each Saturday and recite the *Angelus* prayer together, which commemorates this great event of the Annunciation, Conception, and Incarnation of Jesus Christ:

*The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,
And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.*

Hail Mary, full of grace...etc.

*Behold the handmaid of the Lord;
Be it done unto me according to Thy word.*

Hail Mary, full of grace...etc.

*And the Word was made flesh,
And dwelt among us.*

Hail Mary, full of grace...etc.

*Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,
That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*

Let us pray:

Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we unto whom the incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may, by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

St Alban, pray for us!

St Laurence, pray for us!

The evening hour of six o'clock is a traditional time to recite the *Angelus* but it is packed with extra meaning for us as it is the time we normally begin our "Sunday" Mass together. The *Angelus* is normally said kneeling but on Sundays the forgotten custom is that it is said standing to honour the Resurrection (every Sunday, even in Lent, being the commemoration of the Resurrection). This harks back to an early Council of the Church where it was actually forbidden to kneel on Sundays and during Eastertide! So, standing—if we can—to recite this prayer will be an extra commemoration of the fact we would normally be gathering together for our Sunday Mass. Finally, do bow at the words *And the Word became flesh*, both to honour the Incarnation and as a brief bodily act of adoration and desire to receive Him who would be coming to us in His flesh and blood if we were at Mass together.

I continue to offer Mass for you all—the People of the Parish (*pro populo*)—at the earlier time of noon every Saturday in my House Chapel by the same image of St Alban which used to hang in our old chapel. Although I cannot be with you, I hold you all in my heart daily, and look forward to gathering with you once again when we have passed through the Passion and Cross of the current times. May we arrive safely together again with no loss of our loved ones—please God—and without ever having lost the hope that the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit bring.

Please continue to access the Parish website and weekly updated newsletter for new details and announcements as and when they come.

Yours fondly,

Fr Anton