

Pastoral Care and Parish News: Monday 30 March 2020

Dear Parish family,

As we go through this remarkable and unprecedented time of lockdown due to COVID-19 I am learning much about various platforms of communication, in order to stay in touch with you as our parish family as much as possible. For example, I recorded a service in the church [yesterday](#), the 5th [Sunday](#) in Lent, which included some songs, readings, prayers and a sermon and the file was too big to send. So, to now use an editing tool to shorten the file into segments which can be emailed to Sean, for uploading onto our Website and link sent to the Facebook page. Who would have thought..... I think that our work is going to be very different from now onwards – we see that China is getting back to ‘normal’ with the decline in infections and closure of the special hospitals which were set up to treat patients. This after 2 months of lockdown. Our lockdown continues and for me it feels, and perhaps for you too, that this has been in place forever, after only 3 days.

The lessons set for the 5th [Sunday](#) in Lent were amazingly pertinent to the time through which we are living at present. The valley of dry bones, being brought back to life as a mighty army (Ezekiel 37) can be related to the new life that will come to be after COVID-19 in our country. The prophetic voice of the church, which seems to have been silent for so long must, I believe, be heard again – pray with me for God to raise up prophets to speak God’s word to our nation and people, with power and clarity.

On a personal level, what are the ‘dry bones’ in your, my, life? With this enforced ‘stay home’ and a lot more time to reflect, think and pray, perhaps it is opportune to look at parts of our lives that God is wanting to awaken to new life. In your prayer times, as in mine, let us look at what those areas of our lives are, that have perhaps dried up and need to be re-kindled into life again, possibly then changing who we are.

The Gospel passage from St John, chapter 11, is one of my favourite Gospel passages. The journey Jesus makes from Jerusalem to Lazarus’ tomb is a fascinating one and which begs careful attention and prayerful reflection. From decisionto come down to Bethany.... to declaration“I am the resurrection and the life....” to identification in His heart of compassion with Mary and Martha and the mourning women..... “Jesus wept.....” to inspiration..... the breath of life breathed through Jesus’ command for Lazarus’ to come out of the tomb.

May I suggest that you use each of these words in your own reflections [today](#) and through in the week ahead:

- ***Decision*** - what decision do you need to make about how you are going to live this week under lockdown? How will you structure your day and what new things is God perhaps calling you to do through this week?
- ***Declaration*** – Jesus comes to you and me to declare, “I am the resurrection and the life.” How does this glorious affirmation of Jesus being the one who calls us to live in His resurrected life impact our loves and the lives of our loved ones? The most pervasive emotion I think that we feel during this lockdown is one of helplessness – feeling disempowered by the containment which lockdown requires of us. In our prayers and thoughts let us think about how we can immerse ourselves in living the resurrection life and power given to us by Jesus (see Ephesians 1:17-21 and Ephesians 3:14-21).

- **Identification** think about how Jesus does really identify with us in our concern, fear, struggle with faith and prayer. Perhaps we feel at times that Jesus is far away and not open to hear our prayers. Jesus draws close in His heart to Mary, Martha and the women mourning Lazarus' death – He will draw close to those who will die from COVID-19 and those who will be watching and waiting with them, hoping for recovery.
- **Inspiration** – literally 'breathing in' – as the bones, now covered with tendons, muscles and skin still remained lifeless until Ezekiel, in obedience to God, prophesied for the wind to breathe life into them, so Jesus' prayer to the Father, followed by His command to Lazarus to come out of the tomb, 'inspired' new life into Lazarus' lifeless body – the decay of death was gone in Lazarus being resurrected to full aliveness and health. What inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, are you needing this week? Allow Jesus to come alongside you and, with confidence, receive His command of reassurance, through which that unique inspiration of the Holy Spirit that you need will come to you.

I have not, as may be supposed, ignored the Romans 8 passage, which was set as the second reading for [Sunday](#) – that said, it flows smoothly into all that I have said about the Gospel passage above.

The readings for the 5th [Sunday](#) in Lent: Ezekiel 37: 1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8: 6-11 and John 11:1-45.

PARISH NEWS

Death of John Waddington

I am sad to report that John Waddington died [last night](#). This, after many of years struggling with Alzheimer's illness. There will not be a funeral at this time, due to the restrictions imposed by the Lockdown and this is also Felicity's request. We hope that, once things have returned to 'normal' a memorial service might be arranged. We will keep the parish posted in this regard.

WhatsApp group for St Michael's

Tayna has been hard at work compiling a Parish WhatsApp group through which we will be communicating as well as via the Website and Facebook page. This is quite a task as it requires the loading of every parishioner's cell number onto a cell phone so that the group- can be established. We hope that this group will be up and running by [tomorrow](#). If you wish to 'exit' the group please follow the guide that I set out in my last pastoral letter.

Do also remember that you can click on the link which Sean has posted on the Facebook page, or go directly to the Website for various items that have been uploaded. These include prayer resources for your use at home and with your families – please have a look at these and use what feel appropriate.

Financial well-being of our parish

During this time of lockdown when no services can be held at the church it was a concern at the last meeting of the PCC that those who wish to support St Michael's via the collection plate will not have this option over this time. Can we suggest please that you set up an internet banking facility in order to deposit this collection via EFT. Our banking details appear on the Pew News and also below:

Standard Bank Parow
Cheque account
Ac no: 07 271 5693
Name: St Michael and All Angels Church

The Wardens and PCC are monitoring our expenditure very carefully indeed. This has been the case for a number of years, particularly as things have got more difficult financially. Please do help us in this way as we need every contribution, in order to maintain a positive cash flow and to meet our monthly commitments.

Please let me know if we can help in any way over this challenging time. Tayna is working from home and has access to parish emails. Between us we will do our best to ensure that we keep as closely in touch with you our parish family as we can.

God bless,
Fr David