

ST ETHELBERT'S CHURCH, LEOMINSTER & ST JOSEPH'S, BROMYARD

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This week we have seen a little relaxation in the lockdown rules and although garden centres and refuse tips are now open, our churches have to remain closed. In a recent radio interview Cardinal Nichols spoke about the role our churches play in our lives and noted that, during the past weeks, we have been faithful to the government's rulings but have also been creative. He said, Mass has been celebrated every single day in Catholic churches. People have joined in online but there's something, a big, big feeling in the religious communities, of wanting to get back to a fuller practice of their faith, as long as we can do it safely. The Bishop's conference is currently in discussion with Government ministers and have submitted a detailed plan, in full accordance with public health guidelines, on how churches to be opened for private prayer.

If and when this happens, the health and hygiene regulations with which we have become familiar will need to be implemented rigorously and, as with other buildings, there will no doubt be a restriction on the numbers allowed in to the church at any one time.

Let us continue to pray that some relaxation in the lockdown legislation may be afforded to churches. So that people can at least spend some time in prayer before the Lord.

I will continue to pray for you all as I celebrate a private Mass each day at 12 noon. The mass intentions for this week are:

Sunday	6 th Sunday of Easter	People of our parishes
Monday		NHS Staff and Health Care workers
Tuesday		John & Veronica Parr
Wednesday	St Ethelbert	Catherine Stockford
Thursday	Ascension of the Lord	People of our parishes
Friday		Parry & Finnemore Families
Saturday	Dedication of the Cathedral	Holy Souls

Feast of St Ethelbert

Wednesday is the Feast of St Ethelbert King and patron of our church in Leominster. Ethelbert was a devout Christian king of East Anglia who was beheaded near Marden on the orders of Offa, King of Mercia, in 784. His relics were enshrined in Hereford Cathedral.

Ascension and Pentecost through Art

This coming Thursday is the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord and Fleur Dorrell, the Catholic Scripture Engagement Manager, has produced a visual journey from Ascension to Pentecost using four paintings for individual and group discussion. These can be accessed at <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/the-god-who-speaks/focus/>

Reflection

During the week I came across the following article by Fr Frederico Lombardi SJ, a former director of the Holy See Press Office.

Coronavirus: 'Beyond the Crisis,'

I was reading these days the affirmation of a Russian thinker: "The simple relationship between people is the most important thing of the world!" It reminded me of a lovely song full of joy launched a few decades ago by a nice movement of young people that promoted friendship and fraternity among peoples. "Long live the people!" Some certainly remember it. It talked about many persons we meet every morning on the way to work. It said among other things: "If more people looked at people with favor, we would have fewer difficult people and more people of heart . . . ," and it inspired many wise and positive sentiments. I thought of it many times in the last years, walking on the street, meeting with many preoccupied people as though closed in on themselves, and many others with cables that came out of their ears, who were totally concentrated on their mobile phone's screen or talked to the air in a loud voice who knows with whom, without consideration for the people that were on the bus a few centimeters from them. It seemed to me that the enjoyment of looking at others with benevolence and care was becoming rarer and the ever more penetrating intrusion of the new forms of communication in daily life made them almost strange to us.

After several weeks shut-in at home, I feel a great desire to meet again with different faces on the street. I hope that, sooner or later, in due time, this might happen also without masks and without plexiglass dividers, and I hope to be able to exchange a kind word with them, or even a sincere smile. Over the last months, many of us have experienced with positive surprise the possibilities offered by digital communication, and we hope to be able to take advantage of them also in the future; however, with the extension of isolation, we have realized that they aren't sufficient.

How will we meet again the day after tomorrow on the street or in the subway? Will we be able to repopulate the common areas of our cities with serenity? Will we be conditioned by fear and suspicion, or with the help of the expected learning of scientists and rulers will we be able to balance right prudence with the desire to rediscover and weave again that quality of daily life that — as we said at the beginning — "is the most important thing of the world," the very fabric of the human world? Will we realize (more or less than before) that we are a human family on the way in the common home that our unique planet Earth is?

Now that the pandemic made us experience a problematic aspect of globalization that we must all take into account in the future, will we be able to rediscover the impetus of fraternity among peoples beyond and above borders, the benevolent and curious welcome of diversity, the hope of living together in a world of peace?

How will we live our bodies and how will we see the bodies of others — as a possible way of contagion, of risk of which one must be on guard or the expression of the soul of a sister or a bother? Because at the bottom, every human body is this: the concrete manifestation of a unique, worthy, precious soul, creature of God, image of God . . . How wonderful is the sound of his voice, the rhythm of his steps, especially the smile of dear ones! . . . But, moreover, should this not be true for all the people we meet? Then, will recuperating the freedom from the coronavirus will help us to free ourselves of the other viruses of the body and the soul, which hinder us from seeing and finding the treasure that is in the other's soul, or will we have become even more individualists?

Digital technology can mediate and accompany our relationship usefully, but the mutual physical presence of persons, of their bodies as transparency of their souls, their proximity, and encounter continue being the original point of departure and reference of our experience and of our journey. Jesus wasn't a virtual manifestation of God, but His incarnation, precisely so that we could find Him — and who isn't poor in some way, whether he knows it or not? — and that we be able and must be able to see His face in the face of the other.

With what eyes, with what heart, with what smile will we walk again on the streets and come across many persons on the way that, although apparently unknown, at the end of these months we have missed and that, like us, have felt the desire to meet us again in the daily paths of life of our common world?

