

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

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21st June 2020: 12th Sunday in ordinary time year A

This week we return to what is commonly referred to as Ordinary Time and the Sunday Gospel readings return to passages from St Matthew's Gospel. In today's gospel, we hear one of the most common phrases in the scriptures; 'Do not be afraid'. Although I have not counted the number of times that this phrase occurs in the bible, I am told that it occurs more than 300 times.

In today's gospel, Jesus is speaking to the disciples about the difficulties and opposition they will encounter as they proclaim his message and teaching but they are not to be afraid. The Father's tender care will never desert them. God is not as a remote figure, but as a Father who has intimate knowledge of and care for each of them.

Similarly, in today's first reading we hear of Jeremiah bemoaning the fact that, although he has been faithful to proclaiming God's message, all he gets in return is ridicule and opposition. But we also hear of Jeremiah's faith. The Lord is at his side and his foes will eventually stumble.

The readings today can give us encouragement in the strange times we are living through at present. We may not be experiencing opposition because of our faith, but there are many who are experiencing difficulties or anxiety during these times of trial and vulnerability. There are those experiencing the sadness of being cut off from the sacramental life of the church. Today, the words of the Gospel are addressed to us; Do not be afraid, God is with us, he cares about us and will guide us through our present difficulties.

When will our Churches be open?

We are working hard to comply with the regulations, and hopefully our churches in Leominster and Bromyard will be open for private prayer in the not too distant future. At present, we are awaiting permission from the Archdiocese to open the church at Bromyard. The situation at Leominster has taken a little longer as there are several health and safety issues that have had to be dealt with before we can complete the necessary risk assessment for the diocese.

Because both of our churches are small buildings, it has taken some time to find a way that we can comply with the strict regulations. Archbishop George has issued a statement on the reopening of the Churches in Wales and although we are living in England, most of the points he makes apply to us as well and may help you to understand why it is taking so long to open the church doors. I have copied the Archbishop's statement below.

Thank You,

As some of you know last Monday was the 30th anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood and I would like to say a big thank you to the parishioners for the cards, gifts and phone calls I received during the week. Because of the unusual times we are living through I thought the occasion would pass by rather quietly. I was also taken aback by the fact that so many knew it was my anniversary – the jungle drums must have been working overtime. I was greatly touched by your thoughtfulness and it helped to make the day special

Supporting Your Parish Financially.

Once again I would like to thank you to those who have been concerned about how our parishes can keep going financially without the regular income from the collection. I am very grateful to those of you who have continued to donate by standing order, those who sent cheques and those who have put a donation through the letterbox.

The Archdiocese has now created a way that card donations can be made online to individual parishes through the Archdiocesan website. This online giving can be accessed from the homepage of the diocesan website under the heading: Support you parish during COVID-19 lockdown or from the main donations page at rcadc.org/donations

The instructions should be straightforward to follow and by clicking on the relevant parish you will be able to make an offertory donation via Virgin Giving.

I know that these are difficult times when many are experiencing financial difficulties and I do thank you for thinking about our parishes at this time.

Masses for this week

Although we cannot gather to celebrate the Mass, 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	12 th Sunday of the Year	People of our parishes
Monday	Sts John Fisher & Thomas More	Holy Souls
Tuesday		Vincent Brigden
Wednesday	Birth of St John the Baptist	
Thursday		Sick of the Parish
Friday		Amelia Vobe
Saturday	St Cyril of Alexandria	Holy Souls

RIP

Please pray for the repose of the souls of Amelia Vobe from Bromyard who has died recently. May she rest in peace

Pope Francis: Catechesis on Prayer

Last Wednesday, in his catechesis on Prayer, Pope Francis reflected on the prayer of Moses. The Pope's reflection is now on the Vatican website and I have copied the reflection below for those who might have difficulty accessing the link.

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200617_udienza-generale.html

GEORGE STACK ARCHBISHOP OF CARDIFF

The Archdiocese of Cardiff and the Dioceses of Menevia and Wrexham welcomes the announcement by the First Minister that churches may be opened for private prayer from Monday 22nd June 2020. In the interests of your continued safety, given the measures that will need to be put in place in the coming days, it seems that Saturday 28th June will be the likely date for those churches who fulfil the health and safety requirements to be opened for a specific time to be announced. With the re-opening of churches, certain responsibilities are laid on both the parish

and the diocese to ensure the health and safety of those who come to pray. Amongst these are the following:

Each parish will need to decide the hours of opening and these times will be published on the diocesan website, once the Risk Assessment has been made and the Health and Safety certificate has been issued.

Everyone visiting the church will be required to follow the necessary guidelines and signage to ensure the safety of all.

Each parish will need to provide two or three volunteers to ensure the safe flow and placement of people – seating, distance, cleaning, signage, stewards etc.

PLEASE NOTE:

- a. That the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday remains dispensed.
- b. That social distancing (currently two metres) must be observed – except for household groups.
- c. Each person must sanitise their hands on entering and leaving the church.
- d. Should a person feel unwell, or has been to an infected place in the past 14 days, he or she should not enter the Church.
- e. That the numbers entering the church will be restricted – depending on the seating available. One-way entry and exit paths will need to be established.
- f. That churches must be cleaned every day prior to opening, and portions cleaned during the time it is opened. Special attention must be paid to pews and door handles. Where possible, windows should be open. Air circulation helps reduce infection.
- g. Hymn books, prayer books, pamphlets and leaflets and other items may not be left around for people to handle.
- i. That those who are “shielded” or self-isolating must remain at home and not come to the church for private prayer.
- j. Some of our churches will be unable to fulfil these requirements through being too small, or not being able to recruit the necessary volunteer stewards or cleaners. Hopefully, the main church in each deanery will be able to welcome visitors from elsewhere.
- k. Face coverings may be worn, but are not strictly necessary. Their use is voluntary and not disrespectful to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament or the sacred space which is the church.
- l. Parents and guardians bringing children to the church should be mindful to care for them particularly by ensuring they touch as few surfaces as possible for their own safety.

“I rejoiced when I heard them say “Let us go to God’s house, and now our feet are standing within your gates O Jerusalem”. (Psalm 121:1-2)

+ George Slack

POPE FRANCIS GENERAL AUDIENCE Wednesday, 17 June 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

In our itinerary on the theme of prayer, we are realising that God never liked to have anything to do with those who prayed the “easy” way. And Moses was not a “weak” dialogue partner either, from the very first day of his vocation.

When God called him, Moses was in human terms a “failure”. The Book of Exodus depicts him in the land of Midian as a fugitive. As a young man he had felt compassion for his people, and had aligned himself in defence of the oppressed. But he soon discovered that, despite his good intentions, it was not justice, but violence that came from his hands. His dreams of glory shattered, Moses was no longer a promising official, destined to rise rapidly in his career, but rather one who gambled away opportunities, and now grazed a flock that was not even his own. And it was precisely in the silence of the desert of Midian that God summoned Moses to the revelation of the burning bush: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (Ex 3:6).

Moses opposes God who speaks, who invites him to take care of the people of Israel once more with his fears and his objections: he is not worthy of that mission, he does not know the name of God, he will not be believed by the Israelites, he has a stammering tongue... so many other objections. The word that appears most frequently on Moses’s lips, in every prayer he addresses to God, is the question: “Why?” Why have you sent me? Why do you want to free this people? Why? There is even a dramatic passage in the Pentateuch, where God reproaches Moses for his lack of trust, a lack that will prevent him from entering the promised land (cf. Nm 20:12).

With these fears, with this heart that often falters, how can Moses pray? Rather, Moses appears human like us. And this happens to us too: when we have doubts, how can we pray? It is not easy for us to pray. And it is because of his weakness, as well as his strength, that we are impressed. Entrusted by God to transmit the Law to his people, founder of divine worship, mediator of the highest mysteries, he will not for this reason cease to maintain close bonds of solidarity with his people, especially in the hour of temptation and sin. He was always attached to his people. Moses never forgets his people. And this is the greatness of pastors: not forgetting the people, not forgetting one’s roots. And just as Paul says to his beloved young Bishop Timothy: “Remember your mother and your grandmother, your roots, your people”. Moses is so friendly with God that he can speak with Him face to face (see Ex 33:11); and he will remain so friendly with other people that he feels mercy for their sins, for their temptations, for the sudden nostalgia that the exiles feel for the past, recalling when they were in Egypt.

Moses does not reject God, but nor does he reject his people. He is faithful to his flesh and blood, he is faithful to God’s voice. Moses is not therefore an authoritarian and despotic leader; the Book of Numbers defines him rather as “a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Nm 12:3). Despite his privileged status, Moses never ceased to belong to the numbers of the poor in spirit who live by trusting in God as the viaticum of their journey. He is a man of his people.

Thus, the way of praying most proper to Moses is through intercession (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2574). His faith in God is completely at one with his sense of fatherhood towards his people. Scripture habitually depicts him with his hands outstretched towards God, as if to form a bridge between heaven and earth with his own person. Even in the most difficult moments, even on the day when the people repudiate God and him as a guide and make themselves a golden calf, Moses does not feel like putting his people aside. They are my people. They are your people. They are my people. He does not reject either God or his people. And he says to God: “Ah, this people has committed a grave sin in making a god of gold for themselves! Now if you would only forgive their sin! But if you will not” - if you do not forgive this sin - “then blot me out of the book that you have written” (Ex 32:31-32). Moses does not barter his people. He is the bridge, the one intercessor. Both of them, the people and God, and he is in the middle. He does not sell out his

people to advance his career. He does not climb the ladder, he is an intercessor: for his people, for his flesh and blood, for his history, for his people and for the God who called him. He is the bridge. What a beautiful example for all pastors who must be “bridges”. This is why they are called pontifex, bridges. Pastors are the bridges between the people, to whom they belong, and God, to whom they belong by vocation. This is what Moses is. “If you would only forgive their sin! But if you will not, then blot me out of the book that you have written. I do not want to get ahead at the expense of my people”.

And this is the prayer that true believers cultivate in their spiritual life. Even if they experience the shortcomings of people and their distance from God, in prayer they do not condemn them, they do not reject them. The intercessory attitude is proper to the saints who, in imitation of Jesus, are “bridges” between God and His people. Moses, in this sense, was the first great prophet of Jesus, our advocate and intercessor (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2577). And today, too, Jesus is the pontifex, He is the bridge between us and the Father. And Jesus intercedes for us, He shows the Father the wounds that are the price of our salvation, and He intercedes. And Moses is the figure of Jesus who today prays for us, intercedes for us.

Moses urges us to pray with the same ardour as Jesus, to intercede for the world, to remember that despite all its frailties, it still belongs to God. Everyone belongs to God. The worst sinners, the wickedest people, the most corrupt leaders, they are children of God, and Jesus feels this and intercedes for everyone. And the world lives and thrives thanks to the blessing of the righteous, to the prayer for mercy, this prayer for mercy that the saint, the righteous, the intercessor, the priest, the bishop, the Pope, the layperson, any baptised person incessantly raises up for humanity, in every place and time in history. Let us think of Moses, the intercessor. And when we want to condemn someone and we become angry inside... to get angry is good it can be healthy - while to condemn does no good, let us intercede for him or her; this will help us a lot.

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