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Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church
Catlow Hall Street, Oswaldtwistle
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DIOCESE OF  SALFORD

Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. S D O'Brien
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Friday 26th June 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

There was a reading, used last week for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, that has lingered at the back of my mind all week. It is from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans:

'Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried... These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us.'
(Rm 8:35,37)

Many of us have and are still continuing to face the trials of working, shopping, conducting everyday business, maintaining familial relationships and looking after both physical and mental health, all under exceptional circumstances. I think those words of St. Paul help to ground us amidst the present worries and challenges we are all facing. Jesus Christ, Our Lord, is with us through thick and thin and as we move forward it is by imitating him in his love, his sacrifice and his mercy, that our future reunion, as a parish family, around his Altar is possible.

The good news is that many of our churches are beginning to open albeit at different stages. There are all kinds of factors that are contributing to the slow and gradual re-opening of places of worship both nationally as well as locally. These range from a lack of volunteers because of their age and underlying health issues to people returning back to work and so not having the time to give. The 'R' number, not only regionally in the North West but in specific areas and local authorities, is still very high and that has affected the re-opening of some church buildings. Things maybe moving slowly but thank goodness they are moving – the power of prayer!

The Bishop, in an email sent to all priests today, wrote in regards to the various conditions and requirements needed for a church to be opened:

'You may think my preferences are likely to discourage and even frustrate and annoy people. I accept that as preferable to placing people at risk - a risk that we still do not fully comprehend. I believe that we best show our love for our brothers and sisters by taking all the precautions to keep them safe and well. Can you imagine living with the evidence that some of your parishioners had died through a contagion proven to have been passed in your church?'

It would be hard to argue against this common sense.

Now for us at St. Mary's the practical work begins. Yesterday we had the official compulsory diocesan inspection. A risk assessment is now being produced and therefore we have completed one of our our Bishop's conditions for re-opening church. There are some more things we still need to do...

The PPE required for our reopening will be ready for collection next Friday 3rd July.

'Address: Fitzpatrick Hall (next to Our Lady of the Rosary School and St JH Newman Parish Centre), 1 Davyhulme Rd, Urmston, Manchester M41 7DS. The opening times are 10am – 2pm with 10 minute slots allocated per collection (on the hour, 10 past the hour, 20 past the hour etc...)'

Can a parishioner who is able to collect our PPE from the address above please email me in the next few days at sean.obrien@dioceseofsalford.org.uk Without it we cannot re-open.

Volunteer work begins on the church grounds later next week. In accordance with government directives and social distancing measures, it is vital that people contact Navada Keenan who is kindly facilitating this work. Navada can be contacted at keenannavada@gmail.com .Thank you to those parishioners who have offered their time and services already. We don't need Alan Titchmarsh or Monty Don, we just need helpful and practical hands.

Karen Beard, the parish Housekeeper, will be contacting those who have volunteered their cleaning services this week. Thank you again to Karen and that good number of parishioners who have stepped forward.

You will have read the letter from the Cardinal and the Archbishops of England that was posted on the parish website yesterday. You will have seen from that letter how important stewards are going to be in the foreseeable future. Their role will not just be assisting at church for periods of private individual prayer but also to welcome and facilitate a safe environment once Mass and other forms of public worship begin. At the inspection yesterday, it was pointed out to me that stewards would seat people from the front of the church first. At the end of Mass they would guide those sat at the back of church to the exits first, as well as giving the signal for when each row could walk up for Holy Communion. I had not thought about any of these practicalities including the limited numbers which are allowed in church.

Thank you to those who have volunteered to be stewards and to Jennifer Pickles who has been overseeing this. As you can imagine more are needed because the number of stewards will dictate when St. Mary's re-opens and what liturgies and services we can provide from Mass to funerals, from private prayer to baptisms. Jennifer can be contacted at: jennifer.pickles@virginmedia.com

The Salford Diocesan Safeguarding Department has emailed the following about those who do volunteer to be stewards.

'It is so important that all those who are given positions of responsibility are known to you and are able to be trusted. Having a volunteer not known to you, who cannot be given approval by others, risks putting yourself at risk and being accused of not maintaining standards of safeguarding. Remember that there are some people, not of the diocese, who will try and test our ability to do this. Whilst given to maintain the guidance of the CBCEW in matters of safeguarding at all times we have to accept that these are difficult times when we are looking for volunteers. It is advised that at least one of the stewards has had safeguarding training whilst not all stewards require to have a DBS certificate.'

There will be a future email to all those who have come forward as stewards about the requirements and conditions that the safeguarding department have asked for.

The re-opening of St. Mary's is becoming a reality and not a distant hope, the knowledge of exact dates and times is only a short way off. I am truly looking forward to seeing you all again when, as a family, we can be physically present before the Tabernacle and allow the Lord to refresh us.

God Bless and Keep praying
Fr. O'Brien