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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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Thursday 19th November 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

An iceberg is deceptive as the picture below demonstrates. On the surface of the water it appears only as a fraction of its size. Dive below and you will be shocked to see how much more of it there really is!



The iceberg is a good image to illustrate what is taking place around us at this very moment in time. On the surface we are living through a second lockdown. People are working from home, certain businesses are closed and 'normal' everyday life has been interrupted – again! The world around is a little more quiet and subdued. However, look below the surface.

Look below the surface and you will see that there are carers still nursing behind closed doors. Look below the surface and you will see that there are still neighbours looking out for those on their street, in their flats and next door. There are still good Samaritans, unseen to the world, who are still shopping for those who are vulnerable. There are still anonymous friendly voices picking up phones and chatting about this and that with those who are isolated and lonely. Look below the surface and you will see those people of prayer still picking up their rosaries, not in cathedrals or churches, but in the sanctuary of their homes and praying for rich and poor, saint and sinner, family and friends. Look below the surface and you will see on our streets and in our towns faceless and unknown people continuing to live, work and pray for the world. Like the image of the iceberg, we may not be able to initially see these people and their actions, but if we look closely we will be pleasantly surprised!

I have no doubt that there will be recognition, honours, awards and public adulation for the many brave and selfless acts that individuals and groups have done during these days of the Coronavirus pandemic. There will be many people whose roles and actions, no matter how great or small, will never be known. Either way for us, as disciples of the Lord, anything we do should be done with pure hearts and for Him and Him alone. As St. Matthew's Gospel reminds us, Jesus said that whatever we do to the least of our brethren we do to Him.

'For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me...I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.' (Mt 25: 35, 40)

All our actions are just outward expressions of faith, faith rooted in the love of Jesus Christ, and done in service of Him our Lord. What will you do today? Who will you serve?

Second Government Lockdown

As you will have seen from the statement given by the Bishops Conference of England and Wales, acts of public worship are still temporarily suspended following government directives. However churches have been given permission to open for private prayer. Thanks to those parishioners who have generously come forward as volunteer stewards St. Mary's Church continues to be open for private prayer on Wednesdays and Saturdays 9:30am-10:30am.

Safeguarding

This week I completed a module in safeguard training with other priests of the diocese entitled '*Mental Health and Wellbeing*'. It was facilitated by Pat Jones-Greenhalgh who is a social worker by profession, working in health care and dementia awareness. As we can all appreciate the Covid-19 pandemic has created new challenges for communities especially in regards to mental health. Let's continue to hold those who are suffering and isolated in our prayers. Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle, pray for us.

Thank You

As always thank you to our volunteer cleaners, gardeners and stewards. These parishioners have helped to continue the life of St. Mary's during the pandemic. Also thank you to John Hughes. Without his maintenance of the parish website I would be struggling to communicate with so many parishioners and as I'm finding out many people beyond Oswaldtwistle!

Health and Safety

Before the first lockdown the diocese had initiated a new health and safety programme so that every parish would meet the high standards expected by government legislation. Ian Tracey, one of the diocesan health and safety officers, visited St. Mary's at the beginning of the year and compiled a report. A number of things have been flagged up and with the help of Berni McGuinness, the parish secretary, we have been able to address those issues as best we can under global circumstances. Fire Safety Report (Wyvern Safety Solutions), Electrical Assessment (P. Edmundson), Asbestos Report (R B Asbestos Consultants) and of course my favourite topic – Tree Report (R. Longley & Hyndburn Borough Council) and CCTV cameras maintenance (Mono Security). In line with Salford Diocesan Health and Safety procedure more reports are due and of course when faults are found, I am realising very quickly, money is needed to rectify the issues. Again Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle, pray for us.

Sacramental Programme: Confession and Holy Communion

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed a lot of our usual routine events and this includes the sacramental programme. I feel very strongly that those young people who are actively engaged with

the parish should be able to receive Our Lord and therefore, adapting to new circumstances, I'm beginning the new programme. *If you live in the parish* of St. Mary's and have a baptised Roman Catholic child who is seven years old + and you believe that they are ready to begin preparation for the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion then please do contact me before the end of November. The sacramental programme at St. Mary's is through the parish and not the schools. Mass attendance and full active participation in the life of the parish is just automatically assumed because Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is both the '*object and means of our faith*' (St. Peter Julian Eymard). Without an active relationship with Our Lord, with out regularly being in His Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, our faith can never grow nor can we truly know Him and Jesus wants us to know Him. Why? Because he has Good News for us!

November Souls List

November is traditionally that time when, as Roman Catholics, we pray for those who have died. Over the last two years we have had an All Souls box placed in front of the Altar where people have been able to put the names of their deceased loved ones in. This year because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are going to dedicate a page of our parish website for people to pray for the repose of the souls of those who have died. Throughout the month of November those names will remain on the website under the '**Prayer**' box of the homepage. If you would like to submit the names of family and friends who have died please see the parish website www.saintmarysoswaldtwistle.co.uk and click on the box that says '**November Souls Remembrance Submissions**'. I will be celebrating a number of private Requiem Masses for all those names on the list during November.

Parish Online Advent Calendar

Advent is one of my favourite liturgical seasons. There is a sense of expectancy and a feeling of hope which of course is realised in the birth of Our Lord. There has been the idea that we could do a St. Mary's Parish Advent Calendar. This would involve each day a reflection/prayer/story/memory etc. being posted on the website. What would make this parish advent calendar unique is that each day the prayer/reflection/thought/story etc. would be from you the parishioners. Everybody in our parish family has words and stories of hope to share that could help others during these difficult winter months. Do not worry about spelling or punctuation – you have all put up with my poor grammar for the last eight months most graciously! You may want to write a poem, retell a story, compose a prayer or recall times past at St. Mary's etc. There is no exact word limit and if you wish you can remain anonymous. If a theme is needed then I would simply say look to the baby born in the manger who brought the world hope and love. Have a think and do email me at sean.obrien@dioceseofsalford.org.uk

Thank you to those people who have already submitted various memories and poems so far. More are always welcomed.

God Bless and keep praying
Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle, pray for us.
Saint Joseph, pray for us.
Fr. O'Brien