

FATHER ANDY WRITES:

I would like to thank everyone for their kind of positive comments on my last write-up, it was most encouraging. I would like to let people know that if there is anyone in (or around) the parish who is not well (with or without the symptoms of coronavirus) then please let me know and, if they wish, I will make a visit and offer them prayers and the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Pope Francis is keen that we do not neglect the sick and needy, especially at these most confusing of times. We priests who are under 70 years of age have been asked to take over the pastoral responsibilities of priests who are over 70 years of age, so that covers most priests in the diocese! This includes any funeral services. We have been given instructions from the diocese that in a case of a funeral, there can only be either a graveside service or a service at the crematorium and no service is allowed in church. However, at a later stage a memorial Mass can be celebrated in church when the crisis is over.

Today is the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord. Pope Francis has written a lovely prayer, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, for everyone to pray during the coronavirus pandemic:

“O Mary, you always shine on our path as a sign of salvation and of hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick, who at the cross took part in Jesus’ pain, keeping your faith firm. You, Salvation of all People, know what we need, and we are sure you will provide so that, as in Cana in Galilee, we may return to joy and feasting after this time of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform to the will of the Father and to do as we are told by Jesus, who has taken upon himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows to lead us, through the cross, to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not ignore the prayer of we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.”

In these times of uncertainty and social/physical distancing, relationships with others become even more important. We must keep in touch with others whether by phone, email, apps or whatever. Distancing brings its own form of anxiety, which is contagious. A study at the Max Planck Institute for Human Sciences stated “Emphatic stress increased as a result of witnessing someone else in distress, whether they were a loved one or a total stranger.” When we see worrying on a global scale, it is not surprising that we will be affected. So we need to be the kind of person who tries to calm others down. We can do this by not buying more than we need in the supermarket; keeping the poor and the sick in our thoughts and prayers; checking on our neighbours; helping each other out – because kindness is contagious too. And much more effective.

One last thought: I came across this slightly amended version of the Lord’s Prayer, by Kahil Gibran, “Our Father in earth and heaven, sacred is thy name. Thy will be done with us, even as in space. Give us thy bread, sufficient for the day. In thy compassion forgive us and enlarge us to forgive one another. Guide us towards thee

and stretch down thy hand to us in darkness. For thine is the kingdom, and in thee is our power and our fulfilment. Amen”.