

FATHER ANDY WRITES:

Pope Francis said recently when the churches were told to close their doors, *“I think of the people who will certainly abandon the Church, when this nightmare is over, because the Church abandoned them when they were in need. Let it never be said: ‘I won’t go to a Church that didn’t come to me when I was in need’.”*

This is why it is so important that we do not forget the sick, the poor and the needy, especially at this time when our churches are closed. I remember Father Brian saying when there had been a fire in St Joseph’s church in 1982, which forced the closure of the church, a little girl asked her mother, “How can we go to church, when there is no church? The mother answered her, “Church is not about a building, it’s about people”. It certainly is about people and what great people we have in our parishes – both at St Joseph’s and St Mary Magdalene’s at Maltby.

It’s great to know that when someone is not well, then through good communication everyone can get to know those who are in need and offer any help that is required. Only yesterday morning I got to know that a parishioner was unwell and I was able to offer her prayers and if necessary a visit to administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. She was delighted. For a sick parishioner to know that the whole parish is holding her in prayer is a wonderful gift and has the power to break through any barriers of physical isolation.

With the closure of our churches it does seem that on the surface that we are closing our doors on people, but in truth people’s hearts are becoming more open to the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit that unites us all in solidarity with one another. Keeping in touch with family, friends and fellow parishioners is key to our spiritual growth and wellbeing.

On Sunday we would be due to listen to the story of the Raising of Lazarus. I think this story has great relevance to the unnerving and unsettling times in which we are living in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic. When Jesus finds out that his friend Lazarus is unwell and close to death, he does not seem to panic or rush off to Bethany to see him. His disciples are confused as Jesus

seems to just hang around for a couple of days. But when Jesus finally gets moving and takes another two days to arrive at Bethany, he finds that Lazarus has been dead in the tomb for four days already. It's no wonder Martha and Mary question what kind of friend would do this to their brother. While everyone else is confused and upset, Jesus reflects peace and calmness.

When Jesus visits the tomb, he asks that the stone is rolled away and commands, "Lazarus, come forth" and then says to those around him, "Unbind him, let him go free". (Lazarus was wrapped up, mummy like with strips of cloth around him). Jesus today, is saying to us in our isolation, our locked down/locked up, frightened and lonely state that we are free – free to be who we truly are. Jesus unwraps the bandages of fear, separation, and the uncertainty that bind us. He unties the incoherence, the darkness, the negative, depressing thoughts and the ravings of the mind and we become free to stand shining in the light of Jesus. It seems that Jesus allows us to experience these dark days (in the isolation of our tomb); he does not rush to our aid. But he comes when it is the right time, the right moment and then, perhaps only then, he gives us the gift of freedom – an inner freedom which the world cannot give.

POST SCRIPT: As Thomas Merton once said, "Laughter is a sign of freedom", so here is the Joke of the week! *"A Scottish man is watching the TV at home with his wife one winter evening. Suddenly he gets up, gets ready to go to the pub and tells the wife to put her coat on. "Oh!" says the wife, surprised. "Are you taking me with you tonight?" "No," says the man, "I'm turning the heating off while I'm out."*

Many thanks to all those who are helping to spread the word of the Good News to as many people as possible through the parish WhatsApp, bulletin, website and telephone calls. May God bless you all, much love

Andy