



The Parish of St. Fidelis

24 May 2020

Ascension of the Lord Year A

Dear friends

Ascension of the Lord / Our Lady Help of Christians

As we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension this Sunday, it is also the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians- the Patroness of Australia.

On the 3rd of May I consecrated our parish to the protection and intercession of Our Lady Help of Christians. This Sunday the Bishops of Australia will entrust our nation to Our Lady.

As I wrote several weeks ago, Pope Francis has called on all of us to deepen our prayers to Our Lady in this month of May for all affected by the coronavirus.

As we begin to 'wake up' as a nation, we are very aware of how lucky we have been during this global pandemic. At the time of writing, 100 people have died in Australia. Any loss of life is tragic, but compared to other places, this is very small. Let's continue to ask Our Lady to pray for us in Australia, but also for those places still suffering huge loss of life and economic and social deprivations.

Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Confessions are available on Saturday mornings and Saturday afternoons in a safe and private way. Please contact the parish for times, or to make a time which is convenient for you.

Support of the Parish

Thank you to those who support our parish. Your contributions can be made on line as well as by direct debit. Go to the parish webpage or Facebook Page and follow the links.

<https://stfidelisparish.org.au/donate>

Thanks to those who have chosen direct debit at this time, and to those who have dropped in their envelopes to the presbytery. We need your support to keep going. Public liturgies may have ceased but the council rates, electricity, gas and phone bills have not.

When ?

One of the most common questions that I am asked is when will we be able to come to Mass ? When will the churches be allowed to open ?

At the moment, the State Government has begun to relax some restrictions, and it is anticipated that there may be some more allowances at the end of the month.

In our weekly Zoom session with the Archbishop last Wednesday, he reiterated to us the importance of abiding by the regulations. There are police officers enforcing these regulations in places of worship and other places, and our abiding by the regulations will enable us to continue to move forward.

Hopefully the next round of relaxations may make it possible to have approximately twenty people or so in the church at one time for Masses and other services. Currently we are limited to twenty for funerals only. All regulations will be strictly enforced and will require cleaning between ceremonies and keeping a register of who is in attendance.

It is likely that it will be many months before we see a return to reasonable numbers in the church together. Any change will be gradual and monitored. We will not go back to what was any time soon. It will require patience, perseverance and time.

The dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation still stands for Catholics in Melbourne. We will continue to livestream Sunday Mass at 11am for the foreseeable future. In addition, those who are elderly or vulnerable are encouraged to stay at home.

Sunday Mass from St Fidelis can be seen on the parish Facebook Page and the Parish YouTube channel at 11am on Sundays.

Planning the 'Next Step'

Planning how we implement these changes, and how we navigate parish life in the future will require change and some creative thinking. To help us do this, I would like to form a 'Mission Team' to help us chart a path forward for the parish. I would anticipate that we might meet (via Zoom or electronic means) once or twice a month.

If you would be interested in being part of this Team, please give me a ring at the presbytery or send an email to the parish (Moreland@cam.org.au). I would hope to have a Team of 6 – 10 people to offer leadership, advice and help.

Whilst I acknowledge that this time is challenging for all parishes, it can also present us with some opportunities to do things differently and to engage with people in different ways. Hopefully our new 'Mission Team' will make our transition time fruitful for all of us. Please think about offering your ideas and suggestions.

Opening the Church – 'Church Team'

When we do get to open the church for Masses (for very limited numbers) and for times of private prayer and Reconciliation, there will be some regulations that we will need to abide by. All churches will need to keep a register of who enters the building; all worshippers will need to sit in defined places and the seats will need to be cleaned after every service.

This will require a couple of volunteers to monitor things and help out for each opening. If you would like to be part of this 'Church Team', please let me know at the parish office by telephone or email and we will be in touch about how to do it. We will not be able to open the church without some people to monitor and help and clean. This will also mean that you will be able to participate in Mass and liturgies in the church. It will require all volunteers to have a Working with Children Card. Ideally we would have a team of about 8 – 10 people to take turns to be on duty when the church will be open for Masses and prayer.

Parish School

Our parish school will welcome junior students this coming week, and the remaining students soon after that. I thank our Principal and staff for the marvellous work they have done over these months to help families with remote learning, to keep engaged with families and to prepare the school for the students' return. I think all families will have a renewed appreciation of the hard work that teachers do after this experience !

Celebration of the Sacraments

At present the government regulations limit numbers in the church to ten people, and twenty for funerals. So we are able to celebrate baptisms and weddings for very small groups.

I know that we needed to postpone quite a number of baptisms since March. If you would like to reschedule a baptism under these limited conditions, please contact the parish office. It is very unlikely that we will be able to gather in large numbers for baptisms for quite some time, so rather than delaying too long, I am happy to make separate arrangements for families.

With regard to the sacraments of reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation for our school students, no decision has yet been made. This matter is still under consideration by the Bishops. It may mean that some sacraments will need to be delayed until next year, or that Confirmation may need to be celebrated in smaller groups or in a simpler manner. These decisions will also depend on the relaxation of government restrictions in the coming months.

So, to sum up I think it means that we 'wait and see'. Or in scriptural terms 'keep watch and pray'. I know that these times without Mass and the Sacraments and an open church are distressing. Closed church doors are very confronting and very sad to see.

But we are people of hope. God has been good to us in Australia, and will continue to be so. Let's ask Our Lady Help of Christians to be with us during this time of 'standing at the cross'. May she, and St Fidelis encourage us to be 'always and everywhere' faithful and strong as we navigate new paths in our parish, our city and our nation.

Let's continue to pray for each other until we can pray with each other.



Fr David Cartwright
Parish Priest