Fr Julian writes...Today as we rededicate our country as Mary’s dowry, the light is lengthening and spring is bursting all around us and yet not all is well with our world. In our relative comfort we are waking up to the everyday reality for many across the globe—the tenuous nature of human life. Loss and death is the contradiction of everything which humans build their hopes and lives upon. We may even feel that God seems to be absent when we most need him. Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. Where is God in all this we might ask with Martha, who greeted Jesus we these words as she met him before the grave of Lazarus her brother? We might even think God is behind this pandemic. After all the bible and human history testify how plagues have brought humanity back to their senses and to God. In our gospel today Jesus could have intervened to prevent Lazarus’ death, turning up earlier and healing him had he so wished. So we can say that Jesus allowed Lazarus to die but he wasn’t instrumental in his death. Christian belief distinguishes between God’s permissive will and his causal will - while God permits affliction he doesn’t necessarily cause it. Causes are open ended, and we can see with this pandemic that its course can be fuelled by the sinfulness of human beings (inequitable resources to meet the challenge, a refusal to respond to need and to respect medical guidance, or giving into greed) and exploited by the evil one (instilling fear, despair and lack of faith). If God so permits it, is it because of sin? We disciples are prone to rush to judgement here. Who sinned, the disciples asked last week - was it the man or the parents? Sin can cause affliction but not always so. As Jesus said in the case of the man born blind. It was not human sin that caused his blindness, but rather that the glory of God should be revealed.

So what do we see in the midst of the present crisis? The coronavirus is a deadly enemy, but it has ripped away the veneer masking much of modern life. It has shown us how much we have moved away from what God wants for us. We are beginning to discover what it is like to live simply again, to cultivate family life, to spend time with the children and spouse. We are learning afresh what it is to be part of a community, that its welfare is our interest and that our neighbourhood is wider than our vision. We are finding that communicating with people is more than brushing against people in the queues. We are cherishing life more, that it is better to save it than to destroy it. We are entertaining what it means to sacrifice our well-being for the sake of others. We are seeing that what unites the human family across the globe is greater than what divides, that differences of ideology, religion and nationhood should never get in the way of our desire to build bridges and respect the truth that God reveals in the other. We can hear the birds singing, we can see the stars more clearly and we can breathe fresh air. And people of faith are waking up to the fact that we are not a building but God’s kingdom people on the move. Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God? Come out Church and take off the grave cloths!

Parish Assembly & MSC Mass

Please note that in view of the Coronavirus pandemic both the Parish Assembly and the Celebration of the MSCs’ time in St Albans will be postponed until 2021.

We have begun to send out a Parish Update by email. If you have not been in receipt of these and would like to receive them please email stalkans@rcdow.org.uk requesting the Parish Update. Also, please visit the parish website and click on the coronavirus and parish news tabs to keep in touch and see what resources there are to help you. The website now includes a Reflection on the Sunday Gospel written by Fr Michael or Fr Julian.

Mass is streamed live from a number of Churches. Visit https://www.churchservices.tv/ and click on ‘churches’ in the menu bar.

Please remember to keep your distance from others and to observe proper hygiene.

- Catch it - sneeze into a tissue.
- Bin it – bin the tissue.
- Kill it – wash your hands with soap and water.
- Do not touch your face unless you’ve washed your hands.
PLEASE PRAY
Together with Churches Together in St Albans, this week pray for the Ministers and members of the St Albans City Centre Churches.

For those suffering with the Coronavirus and for all the Sick.

For those who have died recently: Philomena Lines, Anne Lynch, John Taylor, Peter Okoro and Lynn Lillywhite.

For all those whose anniversaries occur at this time: Antonia Gramegha, Michael Campaniello, Helena Cuneen and Angela Anzalone.

May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace

OFFERTORY
Several people who usually contribute to the offertory either in cash or by using the offertory promise envelopes have contacted the presbytery asking how they might continue their weekly giving. We do not know how long the current situation will continue for and I am conscious that with the uncertainty the current situation creates, many will be concerned about their jobs and livelihoods.

If you are able to – and I genuinely mean if - and you wish to continue with your regular pattern of giving you may like to consider giving by standing order. This seems the most sensible way forward as it avoids the weekly handling of cash. If so, please email the parish office at stallbans@rcdow.org.uk and ask for details of how you might give by standing order.

PALM SUNDAY of THE PASSION OF THE LORD
Sunday 5 April Masses will be offered for the People of the Parish and for Andrew Fernandez (Anniv). The Masses for Milly Yarwood (Anniv), Bertie Curtin (RIP), Tony Druce (RIP) and Patrick McCarthy (Anniv) will be offered as soon as is possible.
Coronavirus - let’s not forget the vulnerable  In light of the uncertainty over the Coronavirus, it is understandable that we want to ensure our kitchen cupboards are well stocked. However, we must not forget that this can leave foodbanks struggling. Hundreds of people rely on generous donations from our parishioners. This includes the need for hygiene items, toilet paper, sanitary products etc, as well as sealed packages of dry food, tins, and long-life milk etc. Foodbanks also welcome donations of money - please give what you can. Please also consider if you could spare some time to volunteer - perhaps by driving to collect food for a foodbank – or simply by looking out for your neighbours. Contact cfc@rcdow.org.uk or call 020 7931 6077 to add your name to a list of people who would be willing to help respond.

Love and Feed our Neighbour - Thanks very much for your magnificent response to the appeal for food and essentials to support the work of the Vineyard in St Albans. Over 100 items were donated ranging from baby food to washing detergent, these goods will greatly help the 80 individuals/families a week served by the Vineyard who depend on their foodbank to feed their families. As our church has now closed due to the government regulations, we are unable to collect goods at present. However, if you do manage to go shopping please consider donating whatever you can spare into the foodbanks available at many supermarkets – if every family could donate just one tin, it would make a huge difference. In the last Mass held at our Church, we heard how we should love our neighbour, keeping our distance being one way, another, of course, is through practical aid. Indeed, Fr Jules Chevalier, founder of the MSCs urged us all to be on earth of course, is through practical aid. Indeed, Fr Jules Chevalier, founder of the MSCs urged us all to be on earth.

Faith sharing during Lent  The latest diocesan booklet - A Word for Lent - invites us to see salvation gradually unfold in our own lives, as well as in the lives of the Gospel women and men, whose stories are as relevant today as they were 2000 years ago. Beautiful works of art accompany us on each stage of our journey through A Word for Lent. These Lent Sunday Gospel reflections provide stimulating insights and ways into deepening personal prayer and commitment to Jesus. We are invited to obtain a booklet online (rcdow.org.uk/att/files/faith/a%20word%20for%20lent%20westminster.pdf)

You Too Can Give an Easter Egg – CANCELLED  Sadly, given the current coronavirus outbreak and restrictions in place we have had to cancel the Easter Egg scheme this year. If you have already purchased an Easter egg and would still like to donate, please leave it in the box marked “You Too Can Give an Easter Egg” at the back of the church and they will be donated to the foodbank. If this is not convenient please e-mail the team at ycb@rcdow.org.uk.

Year of The Word: The session planned for 28th March is now cancelled. These remaining sessions reflecting on ‘Matthew’s Gospel’ are currently scheduled for 25th April, 9th May, 27th June, 18th July, 19th September and 17th October.

A Prayer for Spiritual Communion

Dear Guardian Angel, go for me to the church, there kneel down at Mass for me. At the Offertory, take me to God, and offer Him my service: What I am, what I have, offer as my gift. At the Consecration, with your seraphic strength, adore my Saviour truly present, praying for those who have loved me, for those who have offended me, and for those now deceased, that the blood of Jesus may purify them all. During Holy Communion, bring to me the Body and Blood of Jesus uniting Him with me in spirit, so that my heart may become His dwelling place. Plead with Him, that through His sacrifice all people throughout the world may be saved. When the Mass ends, bring home to me and to every home, the Lord’s blessing. Amen.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Knit and Natter  All knit and natter meetings are cancelled until further notice. Ladies do continue to knit at home - think what can be achieved in 12 weeks. Numerous blankets for the elderly, beanie hats for babies, twiddle muffs for those with dementia and wonderful stripy jumpers for the orphans in South Africa. If you need more wool contact Helen (07860 830340) and I can arrange for some to be delivered to you. Keep safe and well.

If you are aged between 16 and 19 and are interested in becoming a full member of the Catholic Church (Baptism/Reception, Confirmation, Eucharist) please have a chat with Fr Julian or send him an email.

The Marriage Preparation Course scheduled for April will almost certainly be cancelled. No new enquiries for Marriage preparation will be initiated for the time being. Fr Michael will be in contact with those who have already initiated a marriage enquiry.
The meetings of the English Conversation Class for Ladies, the Parent & Toddler Group, the Mercy Associates, the Life Ascending (Ascent) group and Mothers’ Prayers are now cancelled. The Extended Adoration planned for Friday 27 March, the Global Healing session for Sunday 29 March and the Baptism Preparation Session scheduled for April are also cancelled.

New year, new prayer life? Why not consider joining a small group to pray and share your thoughts and experiences in strict confidence. A friendly group meets on alternate Tuesday evenings at 8pm in the café area of the Hall. These meetings are currently suspended.

AROUND AND ABOUT

Easter Season Painting Competition – 2020 Owing to the current situation The Knights of St Columba (KSC) have had to announce the cancellation of this year’s Easter Season Painting Competition.

The SVP are distributing 11,500 Vinnie Packs containing cold weather essentials to the homeless this winter. Please could you consider sponsoring packs at a suggested donation of £3.50 per pack? Donations can be sent to Vinnie Packs, PO Box 72264, London SW1P 9EZ with cheques made out to SVP or by bank transfer to Nat West sort code 60-60-04, account no. 4608 8237. Thank you so much for your support.

The Passage is raising funds through the Big Give from 12 noon Tues 3rd December – 12 noon Tues 10th December to support its work Helping Homeless People this winter. Double your Donation, Double your impact. This is a matched giving scheme for online donations. If someone (can be company, individual or trust) gave £10 online matched giving of £10 would bring the Gift up to £20 (and for individuals to £22.50 with Gift Aid with higher rate tax relief it may cost the donor less than £10). For more information, ring Andrew Hollingsworth 020 75921886 andrew.h@passage.org.uk.

Mass for Migrants, Saturday 2nd May, 11am Banner Procession and Mass, St Anthony of Padua RC Church, Forest Gate, E7 9QB. Everyone is warmly welcome to this wonderful Mass, celebrating the tremendous contribution of migrants to the London and South-East Dioceses of Brentwood, Southwark and Westminster. The Mass will include the newly painted icon of Our Lady of Walsingham, recently blessed by Pope Francis, and will be celebrated by the Bishop of Brentwood, Bishop Alan Williams, in honour of St Joseph the Worker. If you are a group bringing a banner, please email frdominic@dioceseofbrentwood.org for more information.

Annual Mass of Thanksgiving for the Sacrament of Matrimony, Westminster Cathedral, Saturday 30th May 2020 at 3pm. This event has now been cancelled.

AND FINALLY

TODAY WE REDEDICATE THE COUNTRY AS THE DOWRY OF MARY

As you know the final preparations for the rededication have been overtaken by the onset of the coronavirus. However let us remember that corona means crown. Our Lady wears the corona of stars a sign of her victory through her Son over evil. The need to rededicate our country as Mary’s dowry could not be more timely given the present crisis. We are invited to participate in the act of rededication today by making the ‘Angelus Promise’ and joining in an act of ‘Communal Entrustment’. See https://www.cbecw.org.uk/home/events/behold-2020 Here is the act of entrustment:

O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down in mercy upon England thy Dowry and upon us all who greatly hope and trust in thee. We your faithful people assembled here offer you this country in which we live. Once it was yours, all its children were your children and you were honoured throughout England as its Protectress and its Queen. Again do we consecrate it as your Dowry, and entrust it to your maternal care. By thee it was that Jesus our Saviour and hope was given to the world; and He has given thee to us that we might hope still more. To you we entrust the Church, which invokes you as Mother. On earth you preceded her in the pilgrimage of faith. Comfort her in her difficulties and trials. Make her always the sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race. To you, Mother of the human family, and of the nations, we confidently entrust the whole of humanity with its hopes and fears. Let it not lack the light of true wisdom. Guide it to seek freedom and justice for all. Direct its steps in the ways of peace. Enable all to meet Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Plead for us thy children, whom thou didst receive and accept at the foot of the Cross, O sorrowful Mother