Fr Michael’s Homily for the Easter Vigil...

They went to the tomb that first Easter morning and the body of Christ is missing. ‘I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified, He is not here,’ says the Angel to Mary of Magdala and the other Mary. The resurrection is not announced by Christ’s appearance, but by his absence and it is the same in all four Gospels. In Mark’s gospel ‘he has risen, he is not here’. In Luke on entering the tomb they ‘discovered that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there’, and again in John, in the Gospel for Easter Sunday itself, Mary of Magdala runs to Peter and John to tell them ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don’t know where they have put him’. Something has been lost, something has been taken away and in that loss there is the stirring of hope. ‘There is no need for you to be afraid’, says the angel, ‘I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen’.

I am conscious as I write this homily, this reflection, for Easter Sunday that this Easter Sunday will be marked by so many absences. Congregations will not meet, our Churches will stand empty, and where there should be a sense of community, togetherness, presence there will be an absence. And it will be the same in so many homes. Where parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends, neighbours may have gathered for an Easter lunch there will be an absence, and yes in too many homes, there will be an absence because somebody is in hospital or because somebody has died…and in all of this we, and the world, look for Jesus, look for God, just as they did on that first Easter morning.

Yet Christ is absent not for any sinister reason, not for example because someone has stolen his body, but because he is risen, because the tomb in which they lay his dead body, and the stone they rolled across its entrance, could not contain him, because sin, suffering and death have been put to nothing and he has triumphed. In his seeming absence there is the stirring of hope. This is what we recount at Easter, this, as Christians, is what we believe. And this year that Easter message is being told, not so much in our churches, but concretely and vividly, time and again, in our homes and on our streets.

Certainly, we are conscious for now of all that has been taken from us – so many freedoms – but we are also privileged to witness great acts of kindness and compassion, and not least the self-giving, self-sacrifice, of those who are dedicated to the well being of the sick, the dying and the vulnerable. Amidst the absences we experience so keenly, these are all signs of resurrection, all causes for hope, because they are a palpable reminder of what true humanity looks like…and that humanity, that true humanity was made concrete for us in Christ, who has shown us that new life, hope, resurrection – has its beginnings in self-giving, in sacrifice.

In the gospel passage we have just listened to, the women’s fear is turned into joy at the news of Christ’s resurrection; they have yet to see the Lord, this comes at the very end of the gospel passage, but already their lives have been transformed. Few, if any of us, could remain untouched, unchanged, by the events of these past few weeks, and life, when it returns to ‘normal’, will return to a new normal, because we will have been re-shaped by new experiences. For sure, our celebration of Holy Week has been different, but even if we have celebrated it away from our churches, the absences, the suffering and deaths, the self-giving and hope that we have experienced – these are part and parcel of the pascal mystery we celebrate – the life, the death and the resurrection of Christ. The Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia, alleluia.

Wishing you the peace and joy, hope and consolation that is the Resurrection & Easter

Fr Michael, Fr Julian & Deacon Steve
Mass Intentions & Readings for Easter Week

Easter Sunday April 12, 2020
Reading 1, Acts 10:34, 37-43
Responsorial Psalm, 118
Reading 2, Colossians 3:1-4 or Corinthians 5:6-8
Gospel, John 20:1-9 or Matthew 28:1-10

Masses will be offered for Stan Phillips (Anniv) and Helena Cuneen (Anniv).

Easter Monday April 13, 2020
Reading 1, Acts 2:14, 22-32
Responsorial Psalm, 16
Gospel, Matthew 28:8-15

Masses will be offered for a private intention and for Mary Bergin (Anniv).

Easter Tuesday April 14, 2020
Reading 1, Acts 3:1-10
Responsorial Psalm, 105

Masses will be offered for Anna O’Boy (RIP) and the deceased members of the Moore Family.

Easter Wednesday April 15, 2020
Reading 1, Acts 3:11-26
Responsorial Psalm, 8

Masses will be offered for Liam Hession (Anniv) and for Robert & Neil Bindloss (Anniv)

Easter Thursday April 16, 2020
Reading 1, Acts 4:1-12
Responsorial Psalm, 118
Gospel, John 21:1-14

Masses will be offered for Kathleen Griffin (RIP) and for William & Eileen Miller (Anniv)

Easter Friday April 17, 2020
Reading 1, Acts 4:1-12
Responsorial Psalm, 118
Gospel, John 21:1-14

Masses will be offered for Kathleen Griffin (RIP) and for William & Eileen Miller (Anniv)

Easter Saturday April 18, 2020
Reading 1, Acts 4:13-21
Responsorial Psalm 118
Gospel, Mark 16:9-15

Masses will be offered for the intentions of Thomas, Josephine & Olive Nee and for Mary & Michael Flavin (Anniv).

Second Sunday of Easter April 19, 2020
Masses will be offered for Annie Cawley (Anniv) and the People of the Parish. The Masses for Anne Byrne (RIP), Maria Froztega (Anniv), John Cassidy’s Family Intentions and Peter Okoro will be offered as soon as possible.

PLEASE PRAY
Together with Churches Together in St Albans, this week we pray for the Ministers and members of Dagnall Street Baptist Church.

For those suffering with the Coronavirus and for all the Sick: Bernadette Witchard, Mary Miskell, Nancy Falloon, Jeff Tan, Johnny Doran, Eileen Cleary, Mary Malloney, Richard Sumner, Sue Gavin, Jim Moss and Ana Isabel Paz.

For those who have died recently: Philomena Lines, Anne Lynch, John Taylor, Peter Okoro, Lynn Lillywhite, Eileen Drurie, Mary Jozwiaka, William Mackie, Margaret Sweeney, Mary Malik, Mariano Casotti, Catherine Mannion, Edward Turner, Fr Austin Garvey, Fr John O’Halloran, Mgr. Canon Frederick Miles, Fr John Helm and Fr Allan Von Kobs OFM.

For all those whose anniversaries occur at this time: Helena Cuneen, Richard Richardson, Angela Kent, Stan Phillips, Mary Bergin, Andrew Fernandez, Milly Yarwood, Elizabeth Eley and Patrick McCarthy.

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 both envelopes and cash. If so, please email the parish office at stalbans@rcdow.org.uk and ask for details of how you might give by standing order.
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 stalbans@rcdow.org.uk requesting the Parish Update. Also, please visit the Parish Website 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. Also you will find the Diocese of Westminster website and Vatican Website useful at this time.

Safeguarding & DBS Checks Even though many aspects of parish life have had to be put on hold there are still things we can be doing to prepare for when things are up and running again. If you are a volunteer and work with children or vulnerable adults you will need to have an up to date DBS in place. If you do not have a DBS or do not have an up to date one, issued within the last three years, why not use this period to complete the necessary paperwork. Much can be done on-line. Please contact Mary Harber at stalbanssg3@safeguardrcdow.org.uk / 07976 277059

Congratulations to all involved in the Winter Beds Project. You have won the Mayor's Pride Award for Voluntary Sector contribution to the well-being of the community.

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.

Pope Francis’ address to the world on the pandemic, the act of adoration and the litany of supplication can be found on vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/urbi-et-orbi-pope-coronavirus-prayer-blessing-html

Live streaming of mass can be found through https://www.churchservices.tv (click on ‘churches’ under menu)

Sunday 12th April Easter Sunday 8am Mass
BBC Three Counties Radio 95.5FM/103.8FM
Cardinal Vincent Nichols’ Catholic service for Easter Sunday will be broadcast on the BBC’s 39 local radio stations. Please share this news with family and friends who do not have access to the internet.

10am Mass EWTN Channel 588 on Sky
Pope Francis Celebrates the Solemn Mass of Easter from Rome

11am Urbi et Orbi BBC One
Live from Rome, Pope Francis delivers his Easter Message and Blessing Urbi et Orbi - to the city and to the world. BBC Religion Editor Martin Bashir, will provide commentary.
A Poster Initiative has been launched inviting Christians to put a poster in their windows as a sign of faith and trust in the Lord in these troubled times. It could well encourage those who are downhearted. It is attractive and obtainable at this link: www.cte.org.uk/prayersofhope

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 the heart of God and stressed that our love of neighbour should be tender-hearted and compassionate.

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.

Please note that the Confirmation set for May 30th has been postponed.

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.

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.

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.

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.