With all the recent talk of herd immunity you could be excused for thinking of yourself as less than human. Even more so when you have been told to stay indoors. It goes against our natural instinct to roam. Together with the other creatures of the natural world we like our freedom and tend to rebel when we are locked in. I used to smile on seeing the cows let out into the open fields after their long confinement over winter. They would run wild with excitement and kick their legs in the air. Free at last. Jesus never likens us to cattle but he does liken us to sheep. Sheep were everywhere in the landscape of Israel so it was the natural image to use. Had God decided to save the world through a people other than the Jews, then Jesus would have used a different image. Even so, sheep presented missionaries with a dilemma. Some indigenous peoples had never heard or seen a sheep. No problem with that here. Growing up on a hill farm in Mid-Wales they were very evident. Also dotted around the landscape were sheepfolds made from the natural local sandstone or limestone. As in ancient Israel, so in upland areas, these were holding pens where the sheep could be treated in a special way by the shepherd…places also where the flock could bed down for the night in safety against the dangers of attack, theft or adverse weather.

In today’s gospel it goes without saying that the sheepfold serves the sheep and not those who would destroy them. Access is all important. The shepherd decides who gains entry into the sheepfold and who does not. In our gospel Jesus likens himself to the shepherd of the sheep but also to the very gate of the sheepfold. Without him the sheep have no security nor viable life. This presents us with a picture of the Church. We are not born into its fellowship in the same way that we are born into a human family. We have to enter through the sacraments of initiation. We become members of the Church through our incorporation into Christ, not through trying to sidestep or avoid him. Many seem to think that faith is something which we simply inherit or lay claim to in another person. But faith is never second hand, and another person’s faith, although it may inspire us, can never substitute our own. Faith is our will, mind and heart response to the Word, Christ himself. This is why the sheep instinctively hear the voice of the shepherd and follow him as he calls and leads. And when he leads he doesn’t need to impel or drive, he leads from the front and they follow.

Sheep will die without green pastures and fresh water, and a good shepherd will provide access to both. In the same way being the Church, is not just about our initiation but about continuing and growing in the faith. Just as the flock is much more than the sheepfold, so the people of God are much more than the walls of a physical building. Once we have found our home in Christ we have entered into a sheepfold with invisible walls. Sure we come together behind church walls to reinforce our identity as followers of Christ, but when we leave the building and go out into the world, we experience a fulfilled life in as much as we respond to the Shepherd’s voice and follow him.

At this time of lockdown when our physical sheepfolds are denied, let’s remember that our very character and life depend upon our identity in the spiritual sheepfold of the Shepherd. During this time of self-enforced semi-isolation when our faith has been scrutinised in unconventional ways, we may have discovered something deeper of the life which Jesus gives, something even of its barely tapped abundance. It is at times like these, when we are deprived of our comfort and when we realise our dependence, that we begin to discover more of Jesus’ priestly love and the priesthood he gives himself for the sheep, he calls us to respond to live sacrificially and in so doing to draw others towards him. We pray that we would all configure ourselves to the pattern of the Good Shepherd. And on this day of all days, Good Shepherd Sunday, let’s pray that men in this diocese, even in this parish, would discern a call to the ordained priesthood. Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, God said ‘I shall give you shepherds’, words which St John Paul II used to introduce his seminal document on the discernment and formation of priestly vocations. So let’s give thanks to God who supplies our needs, as we pray for many to gift their lives in totality to Christ. For those who wish to remain behind the comfort of four walls or who wish to be immune from the herd it doesn’t apply.

Fr Julian
PLEASE PRAY
Together with Churches Together in St Albans, this week we pray for our own priests and members of our parish of Ss Alban & Stephen.

For all those suffering from Coronavirus, as well as the Sick in our Parish

For those who have died recently: Mary Malik, Carmel Johnson, Margaret Markham, Susan Lewis, Anthony Moran, Maria Cristina Blake, Janet Ryan, Michael Catiello, Ana Isabel Paz and Tony Harding

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

Sunday 10 May – FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
Masses will be offered for John Brennan (Anniv) and the people of the parish. The Mass for Anna Ortone (Anniv) will be offered on Tuesday 12 May, the Mass for Caitriana Fleming (RIP) on Thursday 14 May and the Mass for Anne O’Toole (RIP) on Saturday 16 May.

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.
Parish Update

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 us, to complete the necessary paperwork. Much can be done on-line. Please contact Mary Harber at stalbanssg3@safeguardrcdow.org.uk / 07976 277059

Virtual Prayer Group

We begun a virtual prayer group which met each evening in Holy Week at 7.30 pm and we will continue to meet on Sunday and Wednesday evenings, also at 7.30 pm. If you would like to take part, please contact Brendan Roche at bkroche@me.com

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.

Good Counsel Network

Monday 27 April marks the 52nd anniversary of legal abortions. Since then over 9 million babies have been aborted in the United Kingdom. The Good Counsel Network are holding National Day of Prayer and Fasting for Life, praying for the ending of abortion in this Country. Visit https://www.facebook.com/events/3035268766567721/

If you have concerns about:

- being abused;
- worried about someone being abused or
- for a person who may be an abuser to say that help and resources can be found at:
  - www.hertssunflower.org (where there is also advice on how to delete one’s browsing history);
  - Herts Domestic Abuse Helpline 08 088 088 088 or Kim@purplemail.org;
  - Freephone National Domestic Abuse: 0808 2000 247 or www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

In an emergency always call 999 if possible.

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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.

Live streaming of mass can be found through https://www.churchservices.tv (click on ‘churches’ under menu). The Cardinal has written to us to say that every Thursday evening at 7pm, one of the bishops of England & Wales, will celebrate Mass in his cathedral, live streamed, for all those frontline workers in the NHS and care homes, for the sick and their families. This will begin next Thursday with Mass in our Cathedral. The dates, locations and live-streaming information (link in the name of the cathedral) for the next five Masses have also been announced. They are as follows: 30 April: Bishop Richard Moth, Arundel Cathedral, 7 May: Bishop Marcus Stock, Leeds Cathedral, 14 May: Bishop Robert Byrne CO, Newcastle Cathedral, 21 May: Bishop Mark Davies, Shrewsbury Cathedral, 28 May: Bishop Terence Drainey, Middlesbrough Cathedral

CAFÉ Café is well known to many in the parish and many of you will have used their resources before, but if you haven’t, or would like a refresher, Café are making the following online courses freely available for parishioners personal use: ‘The Joy of Hope’, ‘Let It Be’ and ‘The Saints’. If you would like to access one of these courses please contact the parish office via email stalbans@rcdow.org.uk saying which course you would like to follow and requesting the relevant password. If you would like to know more about CaFE why not visit their website at https://faithcafe.org

Year of The Word

The Saturday morning sessions reflecting on Matthew’s Gospel will be rescheduled in due course.

Walsingham on-line Retreat

An on-line retreat given by Mgr John Armitage will begin on 19 April and run through to the 26 April. Conferences will be 10 am and 4pm each day and will be available on the walsingham.org.uk website.
Love and FEED our Neighbour  The Vineyard in St Albans greatly help more than 80 individuals/families a week who depend on their foodbank to feed their families. Their FEED project needs your support more than ever in these difficult times, particularly as many vulnerable children will not have access to free school meals at present. Please consider making a money donation to FEED through www.bankuet.co.uk/feedstalbans or, if you can go shopping, please buy something extra and leave in the foodbank available at most supermarkets – tinned goods are particularly welcome.

The Tablet  We are aware that some parishioners would often buy the Tablet from the back of church, but whilst the lockdown is in effect, we have stopped supplying these papers. You can choose to subscribe to the Tablet, where they have quarterly, six monthly, or annual subscription options on offer. Go to https://www.thetablet.co.uk/subscribe or email Ian Farrar, the Tablet’s marketing Manager for more information ifarrar@thetablet.co.uk

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, beanies 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.

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.

Friends of the Holy Land Pentecost Appeal  The Friends of the Holy Land (FHL) Charity cannot hold many of its usual fund raising events due to the current Coronavirus crisis. Meanwhile, the impact of the virus on Christians in the Holy Land is devastating as so many local people rely on the income from pilgrimages and tourists. The Charity has launched the FHL Pentecost Challenge to raise funds before Pentecost on 31st May. Three long standing supporters have pledged to match fund the first £100,000, so every £1 you donate will have the impact of £2. Please consider making a donation at http://www.friendsoftheholyland.org.uk/pentecost-challenge

Feast of the English Martyrs 4 May  The feast of the English Martyrs is celebrated on 4 May. The 40 martyrs canonised under Paul VI in 1973, previously celebrated on October 25, are celebrated with the 85 beatified Martyrs of the Reformation and the other martyrs of the 16th and 17th century. The feast coincides with the Church of England celebration of English saints and martyrs of the Reformation. These are a significant group of saints in British Catholicism and include St Margaret Clitherow, the butcher’s wife from York who became a Catholic at the age of 18 and was arrested for harbouring a priest. She was crushed to death under a large door loaded with weights. St John Haughton, St Robert Lawrence, St Augustine Webster, and St Richard Reynolds were Carthusian monks executed at Tyburn on May 4 1535. This is the date when the first martyrs of the Protestant Reformation were hanged, drawn and quartered for opposing the Act of Succession that recognised the progeny of the adulterous relationship of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn as the legitimate heirs to the throne and the Act of Supremacy, through which the King asserted himself as “the only Supreme Head on earth of the Church of England”.

Prayer for World Day of Prayer for Vocations (see also https://rcdow.org.uk/vocations/prayers-for-vocations-sunday/)  

Lord Jesus, as once you called the first disciples and made them fishers of men, continue to let resound today Your sweet invitation: “Come and follow me.”

Grant to men and women in our day the grace and trust to respond to Your voice.

Sustain our bishops, priests and consecrated souls in their apostolic work.

Give perseverance to our seminarians and to all those living a life of total consecration to Your service.

Enkindle in our communities a missionary zeal.

Send, Lord, workers into Your fields to feed and guide Your flock as Good Shepherds in imitation of You.

Mary, Mother of the Church, Model of Vocations, help us to say “Yes” to the Lord who calls each one of us to play our part in His plan of salvation.

Amen

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, 
adores 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.