



Living our Faith through Prayer and Action

None of us will ever forget 2020! Covid-19 has dramatically altered everyone's daily life and powerfully exposed the vulnerability that all humans share. This period has forced us to reassess a lot of things. The temptation to return to the past is something that comes naturally to us, but we must always be open to Christ's voice in the present. For Christians, postponing our mission is never a legitimate option; faith cannot be quarantined. It has to be lived in the circumstances of the time.

As followers of Christ, we are called to love and serve our neighbor, to love and care for others, to restore healing to a wounded world; to continually rediscover the meaning of service and solidarity. Across our diocese, we have all witnessed the generosity and love shown by so many people, especially frontline workers and people of all ages at community level. Not all may realise it, but in doing such great work, they are living out their faith; giving expression to what is the essence of Catholic Social Teaching - loving your neighbour as yourself. Today's Gospel reading reflects that very well. In the final judgement the criterion used is the law of love. Jesus tells us 'solemnly' that 'in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me' (Mt. 25:40).

Yes, as followers of Christ, we are called, in the words of today's First Reading, to 'look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong' (Ezk. 34:16). For us in our parishes, this means we must live out our Christian calling in the world and, equally, join our actions to our prayer life- individually and as members of the parish community. We don't travel on this journey alone! United to each other in Christ our lives of service gain new value. Our actions in the world should always draw us together as a community of worship, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ's greatest gift to us. This is our mission! That is what living the Mass is – being on mission in the everyday world.

I have received letters from people about how much they miss taking part in the Mass in person. They do appreciate the availability of Mass online and on TV – and these have been a great help. No broadcast is comparable to personal participation in the Mass. Gathering together goes to the heart of who we are as Church, it focusses us on the other, on the community, it looks out; it impels us to obey the greatest of all the commandments – to love God and one another. I urge the civil authorities in the southern part of our diocese to recognise the vast importance and benefit of communal worship for Catholics (and other Christians too) by allowing us to come together to celebrate Mass once the Level 5 restrictions are lifted. We have shown that we can do so safely and without posing any risk to public health, thanks to the responsibility shown by all our faithful and the generosity of the many volunteers.

Faith is a divine gift, one that needs to be valued and nurtured and made vibrant. So, even when we cannot get to Mass, we nourish our prayer life in many ways. The following are some possible suggestions:

- Our churches are open for private prayer; it's always good to pay an occasional visit for a few quiet moments.
- If we can't get to Mass, can we make time for Mass online, perhaps in a quiet room, away from distractions and with a lighted candle, or a favorite icon? Can we gather the family together- welcoming Jesus in spiritual communion?
- We can be attentive to small daily practices in our family life: encouraging children's morning and night prayers., grace before meals, blessing ourselves at a font by the door, the Angelus, a decade of the rosary.
- The Covid-19 has helped many people to slow down and appreciate more the beauty and fragility of all God has created for us. Perhaps this is a good time to finally read Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (On care for our common home).
- The liturgical seasons give us great richness in our prayer. November is traditionally a time for visiting cemeteries, for remembering our departed loved ones. Advent begins next Sunday, bringing us over these next four Sundays to the season of Christmas. How can we capture these seasons and themes in our homes? And, especially, how can we make our local churches the real focus of Christmas in our local communities this year?

In the Diocese of Clogher, I have asked that resources for Advent and Christmas be made available from next weekend via our diocesan website and social media pages. Resources are also being made available to all our schools. Central to this will be the celebration of an online **Service of Hope**, which I will lead next Saturday at 5pm, and over the four weekends of Advent we will light the candles on the Advent Wreath. This is a time to reflect on our needs and the coming of the light that Jesus brings to our world at Christmas. In addition, I am asking parishes to make an extra effort this year in decorating our churches, and the cribs especially, and to invite people to visit and pray, and to leave prayer petitions that will be included in the Masses over the season of Christmas and on 1 January 2021, the Feast of Mary, Mother of God and the World Day of Peace.

I am especially conscious of those for whom this period of restrictions is particularly difficult in terms of mental health. Many people are struggling psychologically, others are struggling financially and many more families are grieving this year. People need hope. Advent is a time of hope. As Christians, it our duty to reach out and to show solidarity through prayers and actions. In this diocese, I especially invoke the intercession of St Davnet, one of the saints of our diocese and patron of mental health. I attach a prayer which I urge you to pray and promote.

Christ is always with us. Christ's message is one of hope – a hope that comes from God. Today is the Feast of Christ the King. Christ's kingdom calls us to be at peace and to know that we are appreciated and loved by God. The love of God transforms our lives and our vision of the future. As people of hope, let us be confident then of God's faithful and loving

presence with us on our journey at this time. In the words of today's psalm:

*Near restful waters he leads me,
to revive my dropping spirit.
He guides me along the right path,
he is true to his name. (Ps 22:2-3)*

May Mary our Mother, Mother of the Church, intercede for us.

St Joseph, pray for us.

St Macartan, pray for us.

St Davnet, pray for us.

May God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless and protect you all!

Yours in Christ,

+Larry Duffy
Bishop of Clogher

22 November 2020
Feast of Jesus Christ, Universal King

Prayer to St Davnet (or Dympna) of Sliabh Beagh

Saint Davnet, intercessor of those who suffer mental ill-health,
I humbly implore your powerful intercession with Jesus through Mary, the Health of the Sick, in my present need. (*Mention it.*)

Saint Davnet, martyr of purity, patroness of those who suffer mental afflictions,
beloved child of Jesus and Mary,
pray to them for me
and obtain my request.

Prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God alone is changeless.
Patience obtains all things,
Who has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.