

Today, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, divides up the Easter season, separating the first three Sundays which tell of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus, and the remaining Sundays which look forward to the Feast of Pentecost and the sending of the Holy Spirit. This Sunday is known as Good Shepherd Sunday, for the Gospel reading is taken from John 10, and it is a special day of prayer for vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and the consecrated life. In normal times it would also be the day in our Diocese when we take up the annual collection for the Clergy Formation Fund, which supports the initial and ongoing formation of clergy in our Diocese.

In these unusual times I thought I would take a few moments to reflect on what the current situation has meant for priests and also for those studying for the priesthood in seminary.

Reflecting on my own personal experience of the past few weeks, it has been challenging and forced me to think about things in a new way. I have always understood priesthood as being with people, whether leading them and sharing with them in prayer and worship, whether in teaching and learning, or whether in person to person pastoral care. I still think those three aspects are at the heart of diocesan priesthood but now I have had to learn to exercise them in a different way. I am fortunate to be of that generation that saw computers arrive, change and develop so I do have some awareness of their possibilities and limitations. However I had previously avoided most social media, so I have had to learn quickly as to how to make best use of the many possibilities that exist to assist my ministry of making contact with others.

Celebrating Mass without a congregation being physically present is a new experience for me. I have to remind myself that I am saying Mass with and for the parish, and I have tried to take on board the request of many that they would like to be able to 'virtually' share in the Masses offered in our church. This Mass is a first step but I believe we can do even more.

As regards our seminarians they have been dispersed from their seminaries and are living in presbyteries with priests whilst continuing their studies online. I am sure that our new priests will be at ease with new technologies and new ways of communicating, and we pray that like those who have served us in the past they will have the heart of 'Christ the Good Shepherd', the one who came that we 'may have life and have it to the full.'

This weekend also sees the beginning of the month of May, a month dedicated to Our Lady. Pope Francis has asked us to (re)discover the Rosary, whether we say it with others or alone. I would particularly encourage us as a parish to say the Rosary on a Thursday evening at about 7.30 praying for all those effected by the Coronavirus especially those key workers that we all depend on. I intend to do this in the Lady Chapel, and if you want to join me 'virtually' you can do through our parish Facebook page. We will finish in good time to join in the national show of appreciation at 8.00.

With every good wish and blessing,

Fr Eddy