Dear Friends,

Yesterday, 16th June, was my dog, Ted’s birthday... but far more importantly, it was St. Richard’s Day and he is the Patron Saint of our Diocese! There was a time when many folk knew about the lives of the saints as they were considered to be the heroes of the Church and to know their lives as intimately as possible, was considered to be important and the first step in emulating their faith. These days, many have no idea what a saint is and even less about their importance in the history of salvation.

Of course, saints were just ordinary people who did extraordinary things. This gained recognition in the life of the Church through a process called canonisation. Many saints were ‘local’ people who aspired to do good and make a difference to their communities – if you’re ever in Cornwall, you will notice the number of villages that have adopted a local saint and named their village after him or her. The same is true in France and other continental countries. Saints can encourage us in our daily lives by their very ordinariness but with that deep desire to live a life worthy of God. I’ve always had a special fondness for St Peter as he was so slow to understand Jesus and his teachings; he had feet of clay and was something of a ‘hothead’ – not that I’m anything like that, you understand!!

I’m printing below something about the life of St Richard as I feel we should all understand more of our saintly diocesan patron and to realise how he affected life in our Diocese. It is said that he visited every Church in the Diocese and encouraged both the laity and the clergy in their responsibilities to God and neighbour.

**ST RICHARD OF CHICHESTER:**

*Richard Wych was a Worcestershire man, born at Droitwich (then known as Wych) in about 1197. His family were yeomen farmers. His parents died while he was still at school, and the property was administered by guardians, who so mismanaged the estate that Richard and his brother and sister were left almost penniless. The elder brother was equally unable to cope, and it was Richard who got the farm back on its feet, by sheer hard manual work. His brother offered to hand over the whole inheritance to Richard, but with the proviso that he “married and settled down”, as we would say. Richard however had his mind set on being a clerk – a member of the clergy, though that did not necessarily imply priesthood. At any event, he was now free to go to Oxford, where he joined the school of Edmund Rich, the future archbishop of Canterbury and Saint. Edmund had a profound influence on Richard, and their friendship was to be lifelong. After graduating in Law from Oxford, Richard went on to study in Paris and Bologna. In 1235 he returned to Oxford, where he was elected Chancellor.*

*By now his mentor Edmund had become Archbishop of Canterbury, and within two years he called him to be his own Chancellor. For the next three years Richard lived and worked with Edmund, and grew to revere him for his pastoral concern, his devotion to prayer, and his asceticism. In 1240 he accompanied Edmund on a visit to Rome, and was at his bedside there when he died.*
Up to this time there is no indication that Richard felt a call to the priesthood. But now, in his early forties, there came a change. Instead of returning home from Rome, he went to Orleans to study theology, and there after two years he was ordained priest. Returning to England, he took up the pastoral duties of a parish priest in Kent, but he was not to be left in obscurity for long.

In 1244 the see of Chichester fell vacant. The King, Henry III, instructed the Chapter to elect his own nominee, a certain Robert Passelewe, which they duly did, even though it was well known that this Passelewe was a thoroughly unsuitable candidate. Archbishop Boniface of Canterbury decided to make a stand against what had become in practice royal appointment to episcopal sees, and took the brave and unprecedented step of quashing the election and nominating to Chichester Richard, his Chancellor. The King’s immediate reaction was to refuse to accept the homage of Richard, or to release to him the “temporalities” (the property and income) of the see, which were legally held by the Crown during an interregnum. Richard appealed to the Pope, who upheld his appointment and personally consecrated him bishop at Lyons on 5th March 1245.

It was an unhappy beginning. When Richard came to Chichester to take possession of his see, he found the gates of the city closed against him and access to his estates barred, by order of the King. He was given lodging, in defiance of the royal will, by Simon, the Rector of Tarring, who became a lifelong friend. There and then Richard began the work of chief pastor, working from the Rectory at Tarring. He visited assiduously the parishes, monasteries and homes for the sick and poor in the diocese. After sixteen months the King relented, under threat of excommunication by the Pope, although he still refused to restore the income that had accrued to the royal treasury during the dispute. Richard took possession of his Cathedral amid great rejoicing.

The Bishop could now devote himself fully to much-needed reforms. He instituted diocesan synods, at which the teaching and laws of the Church were expounded, and local statutes enacted. These statutes covered a wide range. The sacraments were to be administered without payment, Mass was to be celebrated in a dignified manner, clergy must practice celibacy, observe residence and wear clerical dress. There were instructions regarding the hearing of confessions, and clergy were reminded of their duty of hospitality and care of the poor. At the same time he made provision for their proper payment and security of tenure. The laity were obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, and all must know by heart the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary and the Creed.

He also had to face the task of fund-raising for the maintenance of the Cathedral. He revived the practice of “Pentecostals”, directing that all parishioners should visit the cathedral church once a year at Whitsuntide, there to pay their dues. Those who lived too far away could fulfil this duty at Hastings or Lewes, and those unable to attend at all must still hand in their dues.

Richard set great store by hospitality, and he kept a good table; but he himself was frugal, and refused the good things he provided for his guests. He practised penance, wearing a hair shirt to the day of his death. He was a man of compassion, his biographer mentioning particularly his concern for handicapped children and convicted criminals. His early life on the farm is echoed in some of the miracle stories told about him – the out-of-season flowering of a fruit tree at Tarring, good advice to men fishing on the bridge at Lewes, resulting in an exceptional catch.

In 1252 the Pope appointed Richard to preach the Crusade. The Bishop saw this not just as a means of raising money but as a call to renewal of life – much as we would see a Holy Year. He began a tour along the south coast, which eventually brought him to Dover. Here he consecrated a cemetery chapel for the poor, which he dedicated to his friend and teacher, St Edmund, who had been the chief inspiration for his own life’s work. It was his last public function. A few days later he collapsed.
His last prayer has come down to us: “Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits thou hast bestowed on me, for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me. And thou knowest, Lord, that if it should please thee I am ready to bear insults and torments and death for thee; and as thou knowest this to be the truth, have mercy upon me, for to thee do I commend my soul.” He died on 3rd April 1253. He was about 56 years of age, and had been bishop no more than eight years.

His body was brought back to Chichester, where he was immediately hailed as a saint. He was canonised within the decade, and his body placed in a new shrine behind the High Altar in his cathedral, where it remained until destroyed at the Reformation. But today Richard is honoured again in that same spot, as a Saint and patron of Sussex.

THE PRAYER OF ST RICHARD

Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ

for all the benefits which thou hast given us,

for all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for us:

O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,

may we know thee more clearly,

love thee more dearly,

and follow thee more nearly. Amen

Richard truly, was a saint of God and we do well to know of him and learn from him. Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ.

Fr Keith

PASTORAL LETTER 13 (10th June 2020)

Dear Friends,

Where has all the sunshine gone! It’s a chilly morning as I sit and write this letter! I’ve been reflecting on the Easter season and how it has largely passed by un-noticed this year – and what a shame that is. The greatest festival in the year and somehow, we missed it. Holy Week was at the beginning of ‘lock-down’ and I think we were all, understandably, too concerned for personal safety to contemplate anything else. As the season progressed, one week seemed to merge into another and many of us were left wondering which day of the week it was! The Church calendar was the last thing on our minds. We have, however, managed to keep something of our spiritual life alive. I know many of you have set some time aside each day to read the Bible and to offer prayers. I’ve tried to ‘keep in touch’ with you all with this weekly, electronic letter on Wednesdays and to offer a thought or two by video link every Friday. Sunday is observed with either a modern celebration of the Eucharist or the traditional Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion. I know it’s not the same as being in Church, but we can rehearse and join in with the familiar words and see again the bread being broken for the life of the world – even if we can’t fully participate.
There is a moment in every Eucharist where the bread and the cup are elevated. This is a moment to gaze upon the sacramental presence of Jesus under the veil of bread and wine.... albeit for only a few seconds. There is a wonderful ‘evangelical’ chorus which I say to myself as I elevate the elements at the altar – some of you will know it:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus*
*Look full in His wonderful face*
*And the things of earth will grow strangely dim*
*In the light of His glory and grace*

This, of course links with the verse in John’s gospel: ‘just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that all who believe in him may have eternal life.’ As the Israelites gazed upon the bronze serpent to find their healing, so we must lift up our eyes to see Jesus in the Sacrament and find our healing, our wholeness and the fullness of eternal life.

The Easter season used to end on Ascension Day and, after reading the Gospel, the Pascal Candle would be extinguished with great ceremony! Now the season ends with Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. I can see the theological significance to this for Easter has a new beginning in the people of God... but the drama of Ascension Day is lost!

The Institution of the Eucharist is firmly rooted on Maundy Thursday in the Upper Room with all the Disciples present but with the drama of that night and the impending gloom of Good Friday, the Church chose the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday to give right and proper thanks for the Institution of this wonderful sacrament. It is known as ‘The Thanksgiving for the Institution of the Eucharist’ or ‘The Body and Blood of Christ’ or, more universally, as ‘Corpus Christi’. On this day, a thanksgiving Eucharist is offered and, in some places, at the end of the celebration, the Eucharistic bread is placed into a receptacle known as a Monstrance (from the Latin monstrare – to show forth) and is used to allow the people a longer time to ‘gaze upon Jesus.’ After a period of devotion, the priest blesses the people, not with his hand but with this consecrated bread in the monstrance.

For me, the Eucharist is central to my faith and the knowledge that Christ is truly present with us in the bread is paramount. Even though we are not in Church at the moment, the presence of Christ in the consecrated elements is there and the candle burns brightly to show this even when we are not there. This Sunday is known as Corpus Christi Sunday and I will celebrate a shortened Eucharist and then allow everyone, through the magic of technology, to gaze upon the Bread of Life before being blessed with the very presence of Christ. In the Eucharist, we use the phrase ‘do this in remembrance of me’ – remembrance is not the full meaning of the Greek word –‘ anamnesis’ – a more helpful translation would be ‘do this to make me present’ .... And that’s what we do, week by week, year by year... putting Christ at the centre of his creation. Where has all the sunshine gone? It’s wrapped up in the glory and Grace of Jesus!

*Lord Jesus Christ,*

*we thank you that in this wonderful sacrament*
*you have given us the memorial of your passion:*
*grant us so to reverence the sacred mysteries*
*of your body and blood*
*that we may know within ourselves*
and show forth in our lives
the fruits of your redemption;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Finally, in a usual Sunday service each week, we would pray for three Balcombe roads specifically, as well as praying for the community, clubs and the school in general. We thought it would be good to let you all know who we are specifically praying for each week in our Bible and Prayer groups (as we can’t pray in the service). This week we have been praying for Bramble Mead, Brantridge Lane and Brett’s Orchard.

With every blessing

Fr Keith

Pastoral Letter 12 (3 June 2020)

Dear Friends,

A lessening of the ‘lock down’ rules gives us all a bit more freedom and a chance to meet others although it is not, as some would wish, a licence to ‘do as you like!’ The traffic on the roads is certainly much heavier as people return to work and school and, as shops prepare to re-open, I suspect they’ll get busier yet. We must all still be aware of Social Distancing and observe this wherever we find ourselves. The pandemic has not gone away and infection and death rates are considerably higher in this country than elsewhere in Europe.

Social distancing is alien to us as we are social animals and need the closeness of others. There is much pain when families can now meet, but at a distance; when grandparents long to hold their grandchildren; when friends long to hug each other or, at the very least, a handshake. These strictures on our lives are indeed painful but so necessary if we want to eradicate this terrible virus.

The story on Resurrection morning has an echo of what we are experiencing now. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and found it to be empty. A stranger approached and she supposed him to be the gardener. As the stranger called out her name, Mary realised it was Jesus. Her natural inclination was to reach out and hold him but Jesus mildly rebuked her and said, ‘Touch me not’ – Jesus was distancing himself from this earthly part of his life and his next words speak of this, ‘I am not yet ascended to my Father and your Father; ... to my God and your God.’ This separation was necessary if his work was to be completed.

For many of us, this time of separation has caused us to re-evaluate what is really important in our lives and reassess what really matters. I know I miss my friends and a nice meal out. I miss a trip to a country pub and a good pint of ale! There are, of course, even bigger issues which this time allows us to contemplate. As I get older, I’ve thought more about death and the pain of leaving this world. I’ve thought about the very nature of the Divine Being and the power it exudes in my life. I’ve thought a lot about the nature of the Church on earth and of
our own St Mary’s and we’re so often unaware of its value to us. I am reminded of the words of Jacob spoken long ago in the Book of Genesis:

\[
\text{Gen 28 v 16-17} \\
\text{When Jacob woke up, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was unaware of it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!”}
\]

We take our buildings for granted and yet they speak of the numinous; of the Divine Presence and the continuity of our communities. Our Church is The House of God and we must make sure that it is the Gate of Heaven. Those who are searching for God must be encouraged to find him in our churches and they must also see a glimpse of heaven through them and through the people who worship in them. Social Distancing doesn’t stop this happening and I long for the day we can ‘fling wide the gates’ and welcome people into our Church so they can find solace, peace and perhaps even the Divine encounter. The true Church, of course, is the people of God – the’ Ecclesia’. We must allow our buildings to speak but we must speak even more loudly! We must strive to be the living presence of God in the midst of our communities.

Whilst talking the other day with Denise, our Churchwarden, we mentioned the great prayer of St Teresa and the saint’s words so beautifully exemplify what the Church must be. It is my hope and prayer that our building will again be the House of God and the Gate of Heaven and that we can live out the words of St Teresa .... Remembering always that we are ‘a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart that we should show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his own marvellous light.

(1 Peter 2 v.9)

\[
\text{Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)} \\
\text{Christ has no body but yours,} \\
\text{No hands, no feet on earth but yours;} \\
\text{Yours are the eyes with which he looks} \\
\text{Compassion on this world;} \\
\text{Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,} \\
\text{Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.} \\
\text{Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,} \\
\text{Yours are the eyes, you are his body.} \\
\text{Christ has no body now but yours.}
\]

Enjoy the beautiful weather and may God richly bless you all.

Fr Keith
Dear Friends,

It is with a sense of expectation that I write this letter! As the lockdown seems to be easing and schools prepare to take back some of their pupils, a degree of hope is seeming to descend upon us; however, I believe we’re still a long way off seeing the end of this pandemic but it’s good to know that a semblance of normality is beginning to return. I’ve heard a lot of talk from various quarters that life will never be quite the same again and that our society will somehow be changed. It’s true that some working practices will be re-evaluated and there may well be more working from home. Traditional 9.00 to 5.00 working hours may evolve into a more flexible timetable thus relieving pressure on public transport and help towards a cleaner environment. There may be a greater awareness of one’s neighbours and their needs. Perhaps loneliness will be reduced and a new spirit of ‘bonhomie’ be rediscovered in our communities. These things would all be marvellous!

The greatest change I would like to see is for people to realise more fully their gifts, graces and talents. The ‘lock down’ has encouraged all of us to either tackle new things or discover long neglected skills. I believe that with home schooling, there will now be a dramatic rise in those offering themselves to the teaching profession, as some parents and carers realise they have the necessary gifts to embrace a new career. I know some who now recognise that they have artistic talents: repurposing old furniture, taking up water colour painting, decorating and, of course, gardening! Others have realised they have counselling skills or the necessary talent to be a carer or social worker.

This Sunday is the Feast of Pentecost – 50 days after Easter. This is the day Christians recall the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Disciples. It was an experience so profound that even they didn’t fully understand it! The scriptures also find it difficult to describe and talk of ‘the sound of a rushing, mighty wind and cloven tongues of fire’ .... metaphors to try to explain the unexplainable! The ‘bottom line’ was that they were given insight into their vast ‘treasure box’ of talents and were now able to use them to the full. It would have been a much easier and quieter life if they’d not bothered to use their gifts.... some of them would have, or might have, been spared martyrdom but they were men inspired and re-energised who now used every ounce of creative energy they had to establish the ‘ecclesia’ – the Church on earth which is the visible expression of the love of God. They now knew they had gifts and were overjoyed to use them in the service of all humanity. Their message was simple and followed on from the teachings of Jesus – put simply, ‘Love one another’ or as I once saw it written, ‘Love won another!’

Many of us suffer from the British condition of self-deprecation.... ‘I couldn’t possibly do that’ or ‘I’m not good enough’ or ‘who me?’ This is so beautifully summed up in the words of Reginald Bunthorne in ‘Gilbert and Sullivan’s opera, ‘Patience’:

I sing and I play and I paint,
Though none are accomplished as I
 to say so were treason...
You ask me the reason?
I’m diffident, modest and shy!
We are all vessels brimming full of talent which is just waiting to be released! We want to let ‘our light shine’ and if we have learnt anything from our present situation it must surely be that we all have hidden gifts and it’s now our time to use them…. don’t be a Mr Bunthorne! Get out there and embrace all that God given talent. Do something that will help you to achieve your vision and your dreams! Like it or not, the Holy Spirit is working in YOU and wants you to be the very best that you can be. Go on…. and grab life!!

Fr Keith

Pastoral Letter (10) 20th May 2020

Dear Friends,

This letter comes to you the day before Ascension Day! This is an important day in the Christian calendar and I’m old enough to remember the days when both the old Home Service, and more latterly BBC Radio 4, used to play an Ascension-tide hymn before the 7.00am and 8.00am news reports and children in Church Schools had the rest of the day off after first attending Church!

Such an important day and yet we understand so little of its true nature. The very name is misleading – Ascension means to ‘go up’ yet that is never mentioned in the scriptures. In the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham there is a plaster moulding on the roof of one of the chapels, of a cloud with a pair of feet protruding from it! All of this imagery is unhelpful. We need to see the event we call ‘the Ascension’ as the earthly completion of the Mission and journey of Jesus. At Christmas we recall how God came to earth, born as a baby, of a woman and the Ascension is the returning of Jesus to be with the Father. It is the completion of the mystery of Christ. At Christmas, God touched the earth with his divine presence and identified with all humanity and at the Ascension, Humanity was taken to the very throne of God.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read how the Disciples gathered together ‘and a cloud received him (Jesus) from their sight.’ To the Jews, the cloud was the ‘shekinah’ – the glory of God and so it was that Jesus became incorporated into the fullness of that glory. At the end of the Gospels, we read how Jesus wouldn’t leave them ‘comfortless’ and that he would send the gift of the Spirit to lead them and guide them after his physical presence had left them. More of this next week.

In trying to grasp the meaning of the Ascension, there are some wonderful images given to us in the glorious hymns associated with this day. Some see it as ‘the Coronation of Jesus’ and the wonderful hymns ‘The head that once was crowned with thorns, is crowned with glory now’ and ‘Crown him with many crowns…’ others see it as the returning to the Father – ‘Hail the day that sees him rise!’ and ‘Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour!’ These hymns are of course, underpinned by their splendid tunes; how I long to hear Max playing them so majestically on the organ! The Ascension is not so much a historical event (if at all) as a completion of a stage of the journey of our Faith. Most stories end when we read the last page and then close the book. The story of the earthly life of Jesus is wonderful and marvellous, but the amazing thing is that it doesn’t finish with the Ascension. In some ways, it’s just beginning!

In our virus ridden days which encourage us to re-examine our lives and how we live them, I believe we can take much hope from the Ascension. As Jesus’s physical existence comes to an end, his divine life is re-imagined as it lives on in you and me. Our lives seem to be coming more and more
entwined with the lives of others. Good neighbourliness and gathering together on Thursday evenings to applaud the NHS and Key Workers; keeping a ‘weather eye’ on the vulnerable and lonely, an increased awareness of community and a re-awakening of the need to say ‘thank you’ – these are all ways in which we share the crown of life. This is the Gospel in action and the continuation of Jesus lived through his Church. (By Church, I don’t just mean the ‘God botherer’s – but all the baptised... and those who are not – all those created and made in the image and likeness of God!) Get caught up in the wonder of the Ascension and feel how good it is to be elevated into the glory of the Godhead.... And remember, it’s Jesus who has taken you there! Fr Keith

*Pastoral letter (9) 13th May 2020*

Dear Friends

I think it’s now week eight of ‘lock down’ and I suspect we’re all getting a bit sick of it! It’s hard going occupying your own ‘bubble’ for such a long time and as much as we might like our homes and gardens... there is a limit! I don’t know about you but I long to socialise properly with my friends and enjoy their company. It’s good that we can all keep’ in touch’ through the wizardry of technology but it’s simply not the same as being in close contact and spending a few hours together.

I miss the Church and the Church family. Our shared conversations over coffee and a joke at the Church door all make up to what is sometimes called the Eucharistic Community. Our common purpose is to gather together around the table and to share together in the common meal – the Eucharist. Here we pray and hear the words of Scripture; here it is we hear the words of the Lord through the gospel and here we meet Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Every Sunday, my mind turns to the story of Jesus walking with a couple of disciples on the road to Emmaus. They did not know it was Jesus until they sat at table with him. He broke the bread and they recognised him! Their eyes were opened but He vanished from their sight. I love the words which follow, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us!’ This has always been my emotional response whilst at the Altar and celebrating the Eucharist. There is something so profound, so mysterious and so transcendent in this act of the breaking of the bread that I (thankfully) still have an experience of the risen Lord every time I make my Communion. However else we may meet the Lord, there is nothing to compare to this God given act. I hope it won’t be too many more weeks before we can all gather together in St. Mary’s and break bread together again.

I’m always dismayed when I hear of families who no longer eat together and, when they do, it’s often around the television with plates on their laps. Even Sunday lunch is fast becoming consigned to history. Many modern houses no longer have a dining room as part of their plan and there’s barely space for a dining table in the sitting room! I’m old fashioned enough to believe that family time together spent around a table... where there’s no television, no mobile phones and no getting up and leaving the table until everyone has finished, is important time. This is where families tell their stories, re-live their day, share concerns and enjoy laughter. This is where families and friends enjoy each other’s company (com = with; Pane = bread!) and grow together in understanding and love. It was no mistake that many events in Jesus’ life were centred on food!

*We will get back to a sense of normality at some point but, in some ways, life will have changed. One way I hope it will change is that we will all re-discover the joy of sharing a meal together and gathering around a table – the Altar of our homes!*

May God bless you all.

Fr Keith
Pastoral letter (8) 6 May 2020

Dear Friends,

It’s a long time since I studied Shakespeare for ‘O’ Level. In those days we had to learn great chunks of it by heart, most of which I have long since forgotten; however, one small passage has remained in the back of my mind for a very long time and in these present days, has resurfaced:

There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

Julius Caesar Act 4, scene 3, 218–224

I think that, contained within it, is a little pearl of wisdom for these days which seem to be ‘bound in shallows and miseries!’

Brutus is speaking to Cassius and means to say that the key to success in life lies in knowing that a ‘tide’ or a moment in life needs to be seized and acted upon if we’re ever to make the most of opportunities that come our way. We need a motivation to ‘wake up’ and ‘ride the tide!’ Ships usually need high tides to enter a port or leave it. We cannot control these tides, though when these tides come or leave the coast, the ships in waiting must seize the opportunity without delay. It means to grab opportunities, whenever they arise before we lose them by delaying.

At the moment, it is difficult to see the opportunities that are available to us but they are there. We all have more time to ‘bond’ with our families and to discover things like ‘Facetime,’ ‘Team’ and ‘Zoom’ to connect with those we cannot connect with in any other way. Twenty years ago, such things were impossible but now we have this opportunity. I hear of many people who are reconnecting with nature and whose eyes are being opened afresh to the wonders of creation. The stillness re-awakens our ears to hear the dawn chorus and the nightingale singing at dusk; to listen to music again without interruption and hear the genius of Mendelssohn and Brahms! Many have revived hobbies and turned to art for stimulation and watercolours and oils have made a re-appearance. Discoveries are made in the mundane; clearing a bookcase reveals lost photographs and boxes in the attic become as important as any pirate’s treasure chest! ‘We must take the current when it serves’ and seize every opportunity as it opens before us. Life is still good and very sweet and despair will only be a road to nowhere.
The final book of the Bible is a curiosity in many ways and it is not always easy to understand but there are many ‘glories’ contained in its pages. One such is the vision given to the angel in the church of Laodicea. Laodicea was a wealthy and prosperous city known for its hospitals and learning where the people had grown complacent and were rarely motivated to do anything!

‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.” You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked’. (Rev. 3 v14-17)

Here we can clearly see that God, speaking through ‘his angel’ is not happy with the Laodiceans. They don’t get excited about anything and want to carry on in their old, set ways. They are too self-satisfied and confess that they want for nothing! Opportunities abound for sacrifice and service but they want none of it. The opening words are better translated in modern speak and carry a little more weight – ‘You’re neither cold nor hot…. And you make me sick!’ Would that they could take the tide that leads on to a newly discovered fortune(!) - not one measured in possessions but in humanity and kindness.

Let’s all try and use these days of ‘lockdown’ as being a tide in our lives; let’s ride the storm and then ride high into harbour. May we find new fortunes that will energise us and not cause us to ‘lose our ventures’ and may God never say of us, ‘you make me sick!’ Plough on, good people of Balcombe; plough through the waters of the tide and in them find opportunity and new expressions of life! Go well, keep safe and God bless.

Fr Keith

Pastoral letter (7) 29 April 2020

Dear Friends

Over the weekend, I had a small barbecue…. Small, because I couldn’t invite friends to share it with me! None the less, it was a change from the usual routine and a beautifully cooked (although I say it myself!) sirloin steak was the result served with fried potatoes, green beans and carrot batons! A rather large glass of St Emilion accompanied it and rounded off a near perfect meal!

It reminded me of the post Resurrection story of Jesus on the bank of Lake Tiberius (Galilee) cooking some fish on a charcoal fire. Peter, who was always rather impatient, was sick of waiting around and doing nothing. It didn’t seem as though Jesus was going to appear and so he declared to the others ‘I go a fishing!’ He was returning to his old life; the apostolic adventure was over and life had to carry on. Rather lamely, the other disciples said, ‘We’ll go with you’ and so they set out in the boat. All night they toiled but in vain. They didn’t catch anything!
At daybreak, a distant stranger told them to cast the net to the other side of the boat. This is called the ‘miraculous draft of fishes’ – but not so much of a miracle as a good knowledge of the lake! At a given angle and the sun being in the right position, a person on the shoreline could see a large shoal of fish glistening in the water! On casting the net, so many fish were caught that they were unable to bring it ashore! John recognised the stranger as Jesus and told Peter, who immediately jumped into the water and swam ashore. The others came in the boat towing the net behind. Together, they found Jesus with a small fire on the sand with some fish cooking on it and some bread at the side. ‘Bring some of your fish said Jesus, ‘and put it on the fire’. The disciples’ net contained 153 fishes... only a fisherman, who depended on a catch for his livelihood, would bother to count them! The net also was not torn.

The beauty of this simple story is that Jesus offers his food but only after the disciples’ fish was added to it. Here is the great theological truth. Jesus can only do his best work when we work with him; the mingling of the fish is representative of our lives being inextricably linked with that life of Jesus and together, we can attempt to change the world! A former Secretary of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold once said, ‘Without God, we cannot; without us, He will not!’ – think about it... this is exemplified beautifully in the story of Jesus on the sea shore.

In our present difficulties, this story behoves us to stick together. Peter, impatiently, went off to ‘do his own thing’ - and there’s always that temptation for all of us; but the Lord shows us that when we work together, we are stronger, more focused and of greater use in the world.

An unbroken net? Well, this reminds us that if Jesus ‘catches us’ there is no escape! ‘Thine for ever, God of Love!’ How blessed are we to be part of the Divine family and to know that we are wanted, valued and loved.

Fr Keith

Pastoral letter (6) 22 April 2020

Dear Friends

Will this lock down ever end? Yes, it will and, at some point, we will get back to a sense of normality but I rather suspect it will be nearer to Christmas before we see this. We all seem to be coping and with the support of family and friends, we will get through this. I'm sure we will all be changed by this experience and, if nothing else, we'll all be more thankful for the things we so often take for granted. I am thankful to those who are still working who make my life far more tolerable – for those who empty the bins; maintain the telephone and internet lines; for those who deliver the post and parcel delivery services; to all who maintain the infrastructure of water, electricity and gas. Without these people giving tirelessly of their time and often putting themselves in harm's way, our lives would be very much the poorer.

I seem to see on the ubiquitous social media so many reasons postulated as why we are suffering this pandemic. It's amazing how many times God seems to get the blame as it's seen by some to be his response to all manner of evil in the world! What a poor understanding of God this is and I'm sorry for those whose God is a God of retribution.
On occasion, we all need to be reminded that God is the God of love - unconditional love. The God we see portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament is so often vengeful and partisan and ideas such as ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ are freely ascribed to God. The people who lived in these times were searching for the identity of God. They wanted him to reveal himself, which he often did, through the patriarchs and prophets; through judges and kings. People, as ever, were stubborn and wanted to see God on their own terms. Times haven’t really changed and there are many who want God to fit their own agenda.

The God we worship is the God uniquely revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the God who loved us, taught us, suffered for us, died for us and rose again to a new life for us. He is the God of forgiveness and of new opportunities; the God who reveals himself by opening ‘new doors’ in our lives. Here is the God we meet in Word and Sacrament. There is no retribution here, no vengeful God, no hint of ‘my way… or else!’ He is the God who says ‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do’ and ‘I have come that you may have life, and life in all its fulness’.

I think that I, like many of us, gained my initial theological awareness from the hymns we sing. I’ve always been grateful for the simple faith revealed in what are sometimes referred to as ‘Revivalist Hymns’ - such hymns as ‘Blessed assurance’; ‘Amazing grace’; ‘What a friend we have in Jesus!’ and ‘And can it be!’ but for me, chief amongst them is ‘There’s a wideness in God’s mercy’ especially when sung to the tune, ‘Cross of Jesus’ as this encapsulates all that I believe about God. A apologise (not really!) for printing it in full.

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There’s a kindness in His justice,  
Which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption  
In the blood that has been shed;  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the Head.

There is no place where earth’s sorrows  
Are more felt than up in Heaven;  
There is no place where earth’s failings  
Have such kindly judgment given.

There is grace enough for thousands  
Of new worlds as great as this;  
There is room for fresh creations  
In that upper home of bliss.
For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of our mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make His love too narrow
By false limits of our own;
And we magnify His strictness
With a zeal He will not own.

If our love were but more simple,
We should take Him at His word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord.

If you want a prayer to get us through this, knowing the generosity of God, then this is surely it!

Fr Keith

PASTORAL LETTER (5) – 15 APRIL 2020

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear Friends

Happy Easter! This is usually such a wonderful time of the year and how I've missed the solemn liturgies of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day. The year will seem incomplete without them and so, when we can re-open the Church, it will be with an Easter celebration followed by a party! St Augustine of Hippo serves to remind us that we are ‘an Easter people and alleluia is our song’!

There can be no one who is not finding our present circumstances difficult and finding the day to day realities of ‘lock down’ exasperating and somewhat tiresome. I miss being with you all in our Church and simply talking to people in the village. I miss my friends and shared meals together in a restaurant or a ‘take away’ at home. I had planned an Easter break at the beginning of May but this has now been cancelled and so the effort of trying to reclaim the money begins! For all of us, the challenges will be frustrating and yet we know, this is all for the common good so that we can look forward to a virus free existence once again. My heart goes out to those families who
have relatives in hospital and can’t be with them or lost their loved ones and can’t even have a proper funeral. These are cruel and difficult days.

In the midst of it all, it helps if we can find a little bit of humour to lighten our burden! The other day, I went on line to order some disposable face masks for when I need to go to the supermarket. That same evening, an article on the TV said that ‘scammers’ were advertising all manner of virus related goods and that those who had ordered such goods would never receive them. I also had an e mail saying that the goods which I had ordered were no longer available. Putting two and two together, I realised that I was a victim and that I could wave good- bye to my £10. I managed to find the suppliers e- mail address and, in high dudgeon, wrote an exceedingly strong letter saying how despicable they were profiteering of people’s hardships and trading on the misery of others. I sent the letter and at least felt a small sense of satisfaction that I had done something positive. Next morning however, a small parcel landed on my doorstep… containing disposable face masks!! I had to write again… and eat ‘humble pie!’

At least I felt that my faith in humanity had been restored and that good people still abound in our world. That, of course is the message of Easter… that even in a strange world, good things happen. Death is not the final victory and that when all seems hopeless, there is light leading us to ultimate goodness.

We will pass through this present pandemic and be led on to greater and better things. As we learn to use our time differently, let us not fall away from our faith and remember to try and spend some time each day in prayer and the reading of scripture. May God bless you all and keep you safe and well.

The God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the eternal covenant,
make you perfect in every good work to do his will,
working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight;
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all and those who you love.

Today and for evermore.

AMEN

Fr Keith
Dear Friends,

This is the strangest Holy Week I have ever known. Normally, I am very busy preparing Services and executing them as well as a myriad of other things at this very busy time of year. This year though…. I'm sitting in my study with the make-shift altar behind me and wondering how long this 'lock down' is going to last! I am so concerned for families with young children who must be running out of ideas of how to 'entertain' them and keep them busy whilst not allowing them out of the house! Those who are lonely and living on their own are high in my thoughts also.

Yet this is Holy Week. If we're all finding it strange, so did the friends of Jesus, two thousand years ago. Jerusalem was in a kind of 'lock down' as the authorities were anxious about a possible rebellion as it was Passover time which known for its infectious sense of religious fervour and heightened sense of anger against Rome. The Jewish leaders of the day thought that, to keep the peace, one man should be sacrificed to prevent more unrest and rioting (Mark 14 v.1). Jesus was well known in the city and there seems to have been two distinct 'camps; one group who acclaimed him as their king and greeted him with shouts of 'Hosanna' whilst the other was content to shout 'Crucify him' I suspect both 'camps' didn't fully understand what they were saying. The first wanted a new political leader whilst other didn't want anything to upset the old order of their faith. Both felt fully justified in what they wanted.

Of course, Jesus was not a political leader and he plainly states that his kingdom is 'not of this world'. He didn't come to abolish the Jewish faith but rather to fulfil it. His death was necessary to proclaim the fullness of the kingdom of which he was sovereign Lord and for which, he was willing to die and also to attest that he was a faithful Jew by quoting in his dying words from Psalm 22.

'Lock down' for Jesus came when Mary, his mother and a few other women, took away his body and buried it in the tomb. There was no way out.

Jesus knew about isolation. The 40 days in the wilderness; the time spent on his own in prayer and stillness and the isolation of those long and excruciating hours on the Cross; the dark hours in the stone, cold tomb. It's from his experience of isolation and aloneness that he was able think more clearly and to work out his strategies. His priorities became more vivid and his hopes and aspirations were brought into sharp focus. His hope was to promote and proclaim the Kingdom of God and to bring all humanity into one family which values, respects and loves each other. This, of course is the Resurrection! The first Easter Day when the ways of the world were changed forever. We see in Jesus a God who lives and a God who loves with unconditional love. A God prepared to die for us to unite all humankind. This work is ongoing. The sacrifice of Christ and the power of the Resurrection are still being played out in this world. The Eucharist is our
present day focus where we gather to receive Jesus in sacramental gifts to empower us to be his willing ambassadors and help to proclaim the Kingdom.

Selfishness, greed, cheating, bullying and hatred of others on grounds of race, colour, creed or orientation are still present realities in this world but it is in the will of Christ that we ‘should all be one’ - that is the fulfilment of the Kingdom! We need to seek forgiveness for our failures and lack of understanding of others:

   O God, our heavenly Father, forgive us all our faults, remembered and forgotten;
      for the things we ought to have done and have not done;
      for the things we have done which have brought sorrow and shame
         to ourselves and others.
   As we pray ourselves to be forgiven,
   help us to forgive those who have done wrong to us.
      In Jesus Name, Amen.

In our isolation and self-imposed loneliness, let us spend some time thinking about our failures to bring harmony to this world and, when we emerge from this present misery, to see how we can be better human beings and through our life and actions, be faithful ambassadors for God’s great, glorious and mighty Kingdom. This is Holy Week…. Grow in holiness… to the glory of God!

FR KEITH

PASTORAL LETTER (3) – 01 April 2020

From Fr Keith….

How are your spirits keeping up? No, not the one’s in the bottle (although I hope they’re ok!) but your own spirit? I have to admit that there are times when I could climb up the walls and scream from the rooftops! It’s not natural for most of us to be ‘cooped’ up for so long and without the joy of human interaction. I really miss a face to face conversation; a pint in the pub; a meal out or an evening in with friends - simple pleasures which we generally take for granted and we are now deprived of them.

Looking on the brighter side, we know that we are doing what is necessary to contain and curtail this virus and the signs from the statisticians are looking more hopeful than they were. There will be an end to all of this but sadly, we can’t predict when.

A sign of encouragement to us all is that faith is still burns brightly in our hearts and the spirit of hope is very much alive and well! I’ve been amazed at how many people have shouted from the other side of the street how much they have valued this weekly letter and our broadcast Eucharists on Facebook and You -Tube suggest we are trebling our normal congregation with 117 hits… and still rising! Of course, without the help of
Jane and Alex L-S we may never have gone on air.... but the wonders of technology leads us into new and exciting areas and we’re all on a sharp learning curve in using this new wizardry!

Sharing our faith is not something that comes naturally to most British people. I remember as a teenager being acutely embarrassed when I was stopped in the street by an overpowering man carrying his floppy bible and asking me very loudly if I had met Jesus! I've never believed that this approach is the best for conveying faith and often seems to do more harm than good! The Scriptures teach me that through the example of Jesus, we can see that faith is 'caught, not taught' - it is through example that we see Christ in one another and through example that others are brought to his feet. The spirit of Christ and the hope of Christ is what will change this world.

In these difficult days, it is not easy to set a good example to others as we're not encouraged to meet them! but the acts of kindness I've witnessed in these days within the village and beyond, speak lounder than any 'tub thumping' Christian can ever do. The gift of the Holy Spirit really does burn brightly in so many people even when they don’t acknowledge it themselves.

I still find great encouragement from hymns as these so often are the heartfelt prayers of the faithful and of those who struggling with their understanding of God. The hymn 'Amazing Grace' exemplifies this beautifully. These words from an old hymn 'Heavenly Father, may thy blessing' point us towards something of the Christian life:

May we learn from this great story,
All the arts of friendliness,
Truthful speech and honest action,
Courage, patience, steadfastness.
How to master self and temper
How to make our conduct fair.
When to speak and when be silent,
When to do - and when forbear.

So... keep the faith; love one another and love God. Pray for one another and for our Parish and never fail to give thanks for those working so very hard to protect us - NHS workers, care workers, the Forces, delivery people, shop keepers, food chain suppliers.... And ordinary folk who just want to help.... The list goes on.....and as a 'Thank-you' to them, go outside again on Thursday evening and every Thursday evening at 8.00pm and make a noise with a bell, a pan and spoon or whatever else you’ve got!

Keep well, keep safe and God bless.

Fr Keith
Pastoral Letter (2) 24 March 2020

From Fr Keith….

Every day, this pandemic seems to worsen and the Government’s advice becomes more severe. Now, we are advised not to leave our homes except for exceptional reasons. Our beloved St Mary’s now remains closed and all that for so long has been familiar is now no longer a part of our daily routine. We have to find new ways of living our lives and of being together albeit ‘remotely’. I continue to be concerned for the elderly and vulnerable and for those living on their own for whom loneliness is as much of an evil as the virus. It seems a hopeless situation and one that does not easily find a solution.

As mentioned in my last letter and also through the Parish Council information, telephone contact is essential and this piece from the last letter is repeated here:

_Whilst the Balcombe Community Website will be continuously updated and become a good point of contact with regard to news and advice we realise that not everyone has access to the internet or uses social media. Also, the biggest problem will be feelings of loneliness and isolation therefore:_

**Phone x 6**

The idea being to phone and have a chat to six people then ask them to do the same. _One a day with Sundays off! This gives opportunity for those who are self-isolating to be involved in supporting others._

It is so important that we maintain contact one with another and to those who are finding isolation difficult. We can all do it.

I remember growing up in the grim housing of the back streets of Bury, in Lancashire, where neighbourliness was one of the hallmarks of the community. Front doors were rarely locked in those post war years and, whilst rationing was still in operation, if you ran short of something, your neighbours would rally round to find something for you. If there was illness, people would take it in turn to ‘watch and wait’. This is not looking at the past through rose-tinted glasses… this was fact… this was community.

It was a rich, young lawyer who asked Jesus, ‘Who is my neighbour’ and we then hear the wonderful parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’. I spoke of this the other week to one of our Parish groups and made the point that the first thing the Samaritan had to do, in order to be that ‘good neighbour’ was to get off his donkey! It’s sometimes difficult to make the first move in any relationship; but every relationship needs a beginning. Cast your mind back to the ‘first moves’ of the love of your life!

The first move we might need to make to build community is that moment we get off our donkey and simply make the ‘phone call which is then received by someone we barely know, who is so grateful to hear a friendly voice. Jesus asked the Lawyer, “Who was the neighbour to the man who fell among thieves and robbers?”’ the Lawyer answered “The one who took pity on him” Jesus then said to him, in the powerful words of the ‘old’ Bible, “Go, and do thou likewise.”
Hopeless situations can be full of hope if we only re-discover neighbourliness and a sense of community but it only happens when we take those first steps into the ‘unknown.’ Don’t be frightened to ‘get off your donkey! Remember, you might be able to place someone else’s burden on it. Be good, be careful and keep safe... the Lord has a great work for you and for us all!

Jesus, friend of the friendless,  
helper of the poor: healer of the sick.  
Whose life was spent in doing good.  
Help us to follow in your footsteps;  
make us strong to do right;  
gentle with the weak  
and kind to all who are in sorrow.  
That we might be like you, our Lord and Master.  
Amen.

Fr Keith

*Pastoral letter (1) 18 March 2020*

From Fr Keith....

By now, I’m sure you will all know that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have suspended public worship in all our Churches at this present time. The Coronavirus (Covid-19) is now impinging on all our lives and there is a very urgent need for us all to stay safe. This leads us to feel somewhat fragile and isolated as many of our usual routines are no longer available to us and we lack the familiar contact with family and friends.

There are so many ways people will use to keep in contact but I will write every week and can I ask you to forward this letter on to as many people as you think might find it useful or helpful.

It is said that in the midst of a crisis, we see the best in so many people. Sadly, the worst also as witnessed in our supermarkets in the last few days; however, the best is what we need to see and I know Balcombe is already rising to the challenge. Many of our folk will now begin to isolate themselves and keep themselves out of harm’s way. This is a lonely experience as we all need some human companionship. The telephone is a great friend and we must all use it to the full, to contact one another and especially to call those who are both lonely and a little frightened.

Whilst the Balcombe Community Website will be continuously updated and become a good point of contact with regard to news and advice we realise that not everyone has
access to the internet or uses social media. Also, the biggest problem will be feelings of loneliness and isolation therefore:

Phone x 6

Phone x 6 The idea being to phone and have a chat to six people then ask them to do the same. This gives opportunity for those who are self isolating to be involved in supporting others.

Don’t think someone else is doing it - they might be - but too many calls is better that too few. Just get on and do it - one call a day with Sundays off!

Some may need help with food deliveries especially the staples of life like milk and bread. This can be bought and left of the doorstep. Try and check to see if people are registered for ‘on-line shopping’ and if not, they may need a ‘shopping buddy’. Skype and Facetime can be useful ways to keep ‘in touch’ and you may be able to talk someone through on how to set it up on the phone.

Beginning tomorrow, St Mary’s Church will be open for anyone to use from 12.00 until 4.00pm each day. We ask you simply to wash your hands and dry them on a paper towel which will be provided and then bin it. Try to handle things as little as possible. Perhaps just sit and be still, pray if you do and, if you wish, light a candle on the stand in front of the Chapel Altar. Think of those who are suffering; of those who are frightened and of course, for your family and friends. Our thoughts and prayers are needed for those who are working tirelessly in our hospitals, GP Services and other healthcare operatives. The candle burning on the window sill reminds us all of the abiding sacramental presence of Christ in the Aumbry below.

I too may be in the vulnerable category by virtue of health and age and may need to self-isolate, at some point! I don’t relish this thought at all but if it happens, I will spend more time in prayer and being on the end of the phone for any who may wish to speak with me... about anything at all!

I am always heartened when I read the story in the Bible about Jesus being a guest at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The situation seemed hopeless; all the guests had arrived for the party (which, incidentally went on for about three days!) and very early on, the wine ran out - a tragedy indeed! The mother of Jesus, Mary, simply brought this problem to Jesus’ attention to which he rightly replied ‘Why turn to me?’ - it wasn’t his party and he certainly wasn’t the organiser; but no one who approaches Jesus is ever turned away and Mary know that he would act! He told the Stewards to fill six very large stone jars to the brim with water from the well. This they did and when some was drawn off it was now wonderful wine! A wonderful story of transformation. That hopeless situation was transformed and the party could go on.... It was some party
with 180 gallons of the best wine to go at!! ... and all because Mary took a desperate situation to Jesus! A verse from a hymn so wonderfully encapsulates this:

What a friend we have in Jesus;  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear –  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!

Fr Keith