

SACRED HEART/ EMMAUS PARISH

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PARISH UPDATE 18

Hello everyone!

Despite the attempt at a little humour in the covering email, we are in a very serious situation, aren't we? The increasing numbers of positive cases, hospital admissions, ICU care, and deaths bring to all of us an ever heavier layer of concern in our lives. What do you do?

In the novel *Snow Falling on Cedars*, the wife doesn't know what to do about her husband's suffering and grief, yet wants to do so much. The story tells that

"She sat across from him at the kitchen table at three o'clock in the morning, while he stared in silence or talked or wept, and she took when she could a piece of his sorrow and stored it for him in her own heart".

We do this for those suffering as they receive our support and care, and as we hold them in prayer – we reach to them in their suffering and try to help them to carry it by carrying it with them.

There's a prayer by St Francis de Sales that includes the words:

Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow: ... Either God will shield you from suffering, or will give you unfailing strength to bear it. ... Try to be at peace then. ... Put aside anxious thoughts and imaginations of what 'might be'. ... (The full text of that prayer, and some other prayers, is in an attachment with this letter.)

St John Henry Newman advises: *There is a great temptation to continue brooding on our difficulties: do not do that.*

The other prayers included in that attachment ask for wisdom. Do you use that word often, to describe someone you know as 'wise'? It's not that a person is smart, intelligent, practical, always getting things right: wisdom goes inside those attributes. Wisdom 'reads' a situation, considers various perspectives at the same time, wonders about 'the bigger picture' and brings that to bear in right judgement. It's not a description we use lightly, I think. It's one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we name at the time of the Sacrament of Confirmation – and one of the gifts with which we all have been blessed. Now is an important time to draw on that gift of the Holy Spirit as our situation with the virus becomes ever more troubling.

The First Reading for our Mass this weekend has the young Solomon asking for the gift of wisdom. And, of course, the Word of God is also a word for us.

Wisdom is the gift we are called to develop throughout this weekend's Word of God. It comes from getting to know the ways of God, and shaping our lives on that basis – in the plans we make, the words we use, the attitudes we hold, the choices we make, the things we do. This may mean acting differently sometimes from patterns and customs and behaviours around us. When acted on, this wisdom will have us developing more the 'Kingdom of heaven', described in this weekend's gospel as 'a treasure' to behold!

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In another prayer on that attachment, St Francis of Assisi asks for 'wisdom and perception' to be at the base of the other blessings he wants in his life.

There is also what has become known as 'the Serenity Prayer': '... the wisdom to know the difference'.

As well as prayer shaping our life of faith, there is service, too. The article with this Letter, 'Leaving it all to God' opens with the question 'How do we practise the presence of God?' It answers itself: 'Through prayer and service.'

"At times we might be involved in larger things – clothing the naked, sheltering the poor, helping the refugees, visiting the sick or imprisoned, but it is always small to begin with. It begins with small gestures. Being kind to your family and the people you work with, saying a patient word, writing a card, sending a flower."

It doesn't all come together easily, does it? On that page of prayers there's also a story about needing to keep at it!

Amidst that experience, the response in this week's Psalm is bold in being sure that *The hand of the Lord feeds us: he answers all our needs*. It's just that God's timing is sometimes not the sort of timing that we want!

Whatever the circumstance, says this weekend's Second Reading: 'Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked! Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ!'

With remote learning/teaching now the norm again for our Schools and Colleges, our young people and their families have their lives re-shaped again. And the limitations of visits is affecting our older people who love being with their children and grandchildren.

Let's continue to hold one another in our care and our prayer!

Blessings ... be well ... be of good spirit!

Maurie Cooney

Parish Priest