

29 August 2021

Dear Parishioners of St Joseph's Takapuna,

I sat alone with the Lord in St Joseph's church on Saturday evening, aware that the pews would normally host praying hearts at that time of the weekend. As I reflected, I thought of our supermarket staffers still at work, family members preparing the evening meal, parents caring for energetic children, retirement village residents isolated from the outside world, people in hospital unable to receive visitors, young people connecting with friends through social media. As Church, we gather together for prayer and the Lord's Supper in the church, to be sent forth into our homes, hospitals, schools and supermarkets to live Christ Jesus. Our Mass readings of today highlight the idea that God's message to humanity, spoken most eloquently in the person of Jesus, is a word that we take to heart and allow to shape our actions and attitudes.

Pope Francis reminds us that Covid 19 is an invitation from the Lord to *live differently* – and not just while we're under pandemic restrictions. Some of our behaviour is progressively destroying our environment. Some of our behaviour undermines our relationships, especially with those in our homes and families. Some of our behaviour diminishes our own integrity or health. Some of our behaviour crowds space for God out of our lives, meaning we become detached from our "centre". Are we back in level 4, not just to limit delta, but also to renew our commitment to *live differently*? Each of us can do some small thing to restore God's balance: share a family meal without television and phone, walk to do shopping, use public transport, set aside a time and space for prayer, phone a neighbour, thank a supermarket assistant, control our binge eating or drinking. We progressively *live differently* by taking one or two small steps – not by trying to change everything! And we are more likely to *live differently* if we see our changes not so much as penitential efforts, but more as our joyful contribution to a better world.

During level 4, our churches and schools remain closed. Our school teachers work generously to offer online learning to students. Mass is on our parish website www.takapunacatholic.org.nz, livestreamed Monday to Friday at 9.15am, and at 9am on Saturday from St Joseph's Church, with the recording available later. For Sunday Mass, go to the diocesan website www.aucklandcatholic.org.nz, or Shine TV at 2pm.

In October, the parish will receive the money from the sale of our Bayswater church and land. At the beginning of August, a house beside St Joseph's Church (10 Taharoto Rd) was marketed, but its auction price exceeded our financial limit, so we did not buy it. A couple of years ago, the diocese purchased the house (8 Dominion St) to the left of our entrance driveway, so that it would be available for the parish to buy when we are able. The house is currently entrusted to De Paul House, for transitional housing of needy families. The parish is working on an overall development plan for the whole site, aware that entrance and egress are both less than ideal, and conscious that access to St Joseph's Church is a challenge for the less able bodied. I am very grateful to our excellent parish property subcommittee for their skilled work.

Last year, thanks to the generous donation of a parishioner, we renewed the flooring in St Joseph's Church. Now we're looking to a more significant church renovation. We'll have a couple of meetings for interested parishioners (Thursday 30 September 7pm and Sunday 3 October 12noon – Covid level dependent!) so you can let us know what you would like retained and what you would like renewed in the church. Then an "Exploratory Group" will reflect on your ideas in light of some Church documents on liturgy and church renovation. This group will prepare a renovation brief, report back to parishioners, and then engage with the diocese and an architect, following the process laid down by the diocese. I am very grateful to a diverse group who have agreed to serve on this exploratory committee.

Well before we attempt any further renovation, we'll celebrate the priesthood ordination of our deacon, Mark Napa, on Saturday 27 November at 11.30am. Mark arrived in the parish in March 2020, just before our first Covid lockdown. He is a prayerful, intelligent and generous-serving man, who is grateful for the formation and encouragement he has received from our parishioners. It will be a great joy to host Mark's ordination in St Joseph's Church. I hope as many of you as possible will participate, and I know that we will all try to ensure that it is a milestone celebration for our parish.

Thank God we were able to celebrate the Confirmation and first Holy Communion of over 60 of our children before we went into lockdown! Let's pray for these young ones, that the gifts of the Lord will deepen in them and give them strength for their lives. And let's encourage their families to help these young ones feel part of the life of the praying Church.

While we are all affected by Covid, keep in prayer families unable to offer proper funerals to their loved ones who die, and families struggling to make ends meet because lack of employment has depleted income. Our St Vincent de Paul group has provided a large number of food parcels to needy families. Contact them if you need food 021 088 67844. If you want to make a donation their account is 12-3008-0043519-00.

Finally, I would like to highlight a diocesan festival of our faith, *Rejoice*, planned for Saturday 16 October, to which you are all invited. Yes, it is Covid level dependent! To be held at our Flat Bush complex (the new St Luke's Church and Sancta Maria College), it will begin with a festival Mass celebrated by our bishops at 9am. The day will include talks from speakers, activities for children, food stalls, religious exhibitions, and an opportunity to gather as a diocesan family. The main festival concludes at 5pm, to be followed by a youth festival from 7 to 10pm. The festival is a response to Pope Francis' challenge: "Now we need a movement of people who know we need each other, and have a sense of responsibility to others and to the world. Let us encounter Christ afresh!"

You are remembered daily, as your priests and deacon gather in prayer and celebrate Mass.

God bless,

David Tonks