

Dear Parishioners of St Joseph's,

This past week I was asked if a "pop up" Covid vaccination centre could be located at St Joseph's. I was happy to say yes, if it would be of benefit to the community. We'll wait and see what happens. Just as we're waiting for indications from the prime minister and our health authorities on October 4, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, about a Covid level change. With level 3, a handful of children, whose parents are essential workers, have returned to school. We listen each day to the number of new Covid cases, disappointed that a single figure number occurred only once, before we jumped again to almost 20. Our longing for a Covid-free environment is natural: we like things to be right, unrestricted, safe, easy.

However, living with Covid reminds us of the challenge it is to live in an imperfect world, with imperfect other people and with our imperfect selves. The readings of today's Mass (especially Numbers 11:25-29 and Mark 9:38-48) tell of the way that God works through people who don't always measure up to what is expected. Jesus calls them the "little ones". The "little ones" can be annoying, disturbing, disruptive. They don't turn up for their household chores, they interrupt when we're talking, they don't wear a mask when shopping, they are irregular with Mass attendance. The little ones can be challenged – but they are not to be put down. Jesus acknowledges that our natural instinct is to hit, kick or look down on the little ones. He says it's better to remove our own striking hand or arrogant eye than to undermine the fragile goodness in another.

We can extend "little ones" from people to life situations that are annoying – like Covid restrictions. We must avoid becoming complainers, like God's chosen people of old on their desert trek from slavery to the promised land, a people who grumbled and whined frequently. If we bring a negative attitude to life, we fail to see in "little ones" the working of God. God is present in annoying people and in annoying situations. God can use such people and situations for our growth, as long as we treat the irritation we experience as a little thing.

This is not easy if lockdown has jeopardised our business, diminished our income or stretched our family relationships. Yet, compared with the multitude of God's blessings under our noses, the irritations are little things. Continue imploring the Lord for the strength we all need to face the challenges. And be assured that you are remembered daily by Ephrem, Mark, Nathaniel and me at Mass and in our prayers.

Monday 27 September is the feast of St Vincent de Paul. I want to acknowledge the immense work being done by members of our St Vincent de Paul group in preparing and often delivering food parcels to needy families at present. The great generosity of our parishioners to the collection at the end of Mass on the first Sunday each month means that there is money to restock our food bank continually. Our North Shore St Vincent de Paul groups, along with De Paul House at Northcote and young Vinnies groups at our secondary schools give impressive witness to the mission of Jesus to God's little ones in the wider community.

During Covid level 3, our churches remain closed and there are no public Masses. We are able to celebrate funerals and weddings with up to ten people present. If we move to Covid level 2, with an indoor restriction of 50 people, there will be no public

Sunday Masses, but you will be welcome to attend weekdays Masses. If the restriction number is 100 people, then Sunday Masses will be available as well.

Looking to the time when we move down a Covid level, Bishop Pat recently wrote:

We are aware that Church gatherings can be epicentres for new outbreaks of the coronavirus so my hope is that, if we can strictly follow the following protocols at Level 2, we can show our determination to do what we can to make New Zealand Covid-free.

*If parishes feel they can provide **Masses** at Level 2, while also keeping the Government advice for Worship and faith based gatherings on the Ministry of Health website, they are welcome to do so:*

- The required 2 metre spacing between worshippers;*
- Worshippers must manually sign in or scan a QR code when entering the church;*
- The wearing of masks is strongly recommended (as when going to the supermarket or other such venues);*
- No Holy Water in fonts;*
- No physical contact at the Sign of Peace;*
- No Communion from the chalice;*
- Receiving Communion in the palm of the hand is strongly recommended.*

Thanks for your patience and co-operation during these challenging days. Hopefully we will soon be able to return to life at Alert Level 1.

And do not hesitate to get vaccinated when the opportunity arises.

Every day, I spend time in St Joseph's church with the Lord, aware that I represent you all, as I gaze at the empty pews and locked doors. I know you are hungry for the gifts of the Eucharist. I know you daily bring your heart to the Lord. Continue being the domestic Church, the Body of Christ in action at home and in the world.

God bless,

David Tonks