

Parish of Bangor, Member of Ards Pastoral Community

Parish Priest: Very Rev Joseph Gunn St Comgall's Presbytery, 27 Brunswick Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT20 3DS
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4th Sunday in Lent – 22nd March 2020

SUNDAY MASS TIMES

ALL BANGOR PARISH PUBLIC MASSES

are cancelled until further notice.
The weekend Sunday Mass will be said for all parishioners living and deceased.

PLEASE ACCESS THE ONLINE MASS LOCALLY

NEWTOWNARDS Times:

Daily Mon-Friday 9.30am

Weekend: Sat 6.30pm Sunday 11.30am

RADIO ULSTER SUNDAY BROADCAST on Sunday 29th March at 10.15am (remember go forward 1hr, clocks change)

Stations of the Cross at 7pm on Tuesday 24th March

www.newtownardsandcomberparish.com

HOLYWOOD Times:

Daily

Tues-Thursday 9.30am, Mon & Fri 7.00pm

Weekend: Sunday 12noon

www.stcolmcilleshollywood.org

THE PARISH CENTRE IS CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

6 PAGE BULLETIN this weekend which includes the Readings of the 4th Sunday of Lent Mass & article by Daniel P. Horan

**St Vincent de Paul
Helpline 077 0367 9384**

Bethany Bereavement Support Group

we are here to support and listen. Confidential.

075 1085 2157

Your prayers are requested for:



cently Deceased: James Kelly

Month's Mind: Jerry Carr

Anniversaries:

Edith Hewitt, Bernard Brady, Celia Matthews, Marie Henry, Austin Hinds, Winfred O'Neill.

The prayer in honour of St Comgall to be found in the Bangor Antiphony concludes with the following which I suggest as a motto for this Parish of Bangor.

*"Through the merits and prayers of St Comgall our Abbott,
keep all of us O Lord, in your peace."*

St Comgall lived in the sixth century and archaeologists tell us that Ireland was afflicted with a devastating plague at that time and they link this fact with the remarkable growth of monasteries in a country which was in the process of being Christianised. St Comgall therefore would have understood our worries and concerns as we prepare to face the coronavirus pandemic. Our only response can be that of prayer:

Prayer for the sick.

Prayer for those who care for them.

Prayer for those who are researching antidotes and vaccines.

Prayer for those in positions of authority who are doing their best to navigate uncharted waters.

Prayer for the fearful.

We remember that the most repeated phrase in the scriptures is *'do not be afraid.'* We ponder this and see in it God's profound understanding of our fragility. Elsewhere God invites to himself all of us who *'labour and are heavy burdened and He will give us rest.'*

We remember also Christ's statement that

'in this world you will have trouble but do not be afraid I have overcome the world.'

We are asked to trust in the mercy of our God of whom St Therese says *'the only thing that God can do is love.'* Trust in God is by definition reliance on Him without our knowing or sometimes even being capable of imagining the outcome. As we look forward to the Passion of Christ in Holy Week we are reminded in a particularly poignant way of His trust in the Father when he prayed, *'into your hands I commend my spirit.'* Let us pray for one another so that we can be open to seeing the needs of others and be ready to endure sacrifices and limitations assumed for the common good.

May the prayers of the four saints of Bangor, Comgall, Columbanus, Gall and Malachy protect us all.

Fr J Gunn



Readings at Mass – Sunday 22nd March

First reading (1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13) *David is anointed by Samuel*

The Lord said to Samuel, 'Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen myself a king among his sons.' When Samuel arrived, he caught sight of Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands there before him,' but the Lord said to Samuel, 'Take no notice of his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him: God does not see as man sees: man looks at appearances but the Lord looks at the heart.' Jesse presented his seven sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, 'The Lord has not chosen these.' He then asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?' He answered, 'There is still one left, the youngest; he is out looking after the sheep.' Then Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send for him; we will not sit down to eat until he comes.' Jesse had him sent for, a boy of fresh complexion, with fine eyes and pleasant bearing. The Lord said, 'Come, anoint him, for this is the one.' At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him where he stood with his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord seized on David and stayed with him from that day on.

The Word of God. **R: Thanks be to God.**

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 22(23)

The Lord is my shepherd: there is nothing I shall want.

The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me,
to revive my drooping spirit. **Response.**

He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.
If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.
You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort. **Response.**

You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing. **Response.**

Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
all the days of my life.
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever. **Response.**

Second reading (Ephesians 5:8-14) *Anything exposed by the light will turn into light.*

You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and right living and truth. Try to discover what the Lord wants of you, having nothing to do with the futile works of darkness but exposing them by contrast. The things which are done in secret are things that people are ashamed even to speak of; but anything exposed by the light will be illuminated and anything illuminated turns into light. That is why it is said:

Wake up from your sleep, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

The Word of God. **R: Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation - (Jn8:12)

Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God! I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life. Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!

Gospel (John 9:1-41) *The blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored*

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?' 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

'As long as the day lasts
I must carry out the work of the one who sent me;
the night will soon be here when no one can work.
As long as I am in the world
I am the light of the world.'

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (a name that means 'sent'). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' The man himself said, 'I am the man.' So they said to him, 'Then how do your eyes come to be open?' 'The man called Jesus' he answered 'made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I could see.' They asked, 'Where is he?' 'I don't know' he answered.

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath.' Others said, 'How could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' 'He is a prophet' replied the man. However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, 'Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?' His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we do not know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.' His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough; ask him.'

So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, 'Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner.' The man answered, 'I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?' At this they hurled abuse at him: 'You can be his disciple,' they said 'we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man replied, 'Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing.' 'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir,' the man replied 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.' The man said, 'Lord, I believe', and worshipped him.

Jesus said:

'It is for judgement
that I have come into this world,
so that those without sight may see
and those with sight turn blind.'

Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, 'We are not blind, surely?' Jesus replied:

'Blind? If you were, you would not be guilty, but since you say, "We see," your guilt remains.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

R: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Seeing Your Life Through the Lens of the Gospel of Saint John 9:1-41

A long story like the one we have today provides many different points of entry for prayer. Read the story and stay with what resonates with you. Some possible points of entry are:

1. The blind man was healed. Can you recall occasions when some blindness of yours was taken away and you could see in a new way? What was that experience like for you.
2. The Pharisees claimed to be the ones who could see, who knew where God was to be found, when in fact they were blind. It was the man born blind who showed himself open to seeing the hand of God at work in what happened. There can be some of each attitude in us. What has helped you to be open to seeing the hand of God at work in your life? Who have been the Jesus people who have led you to this point?
3. There are many characters in the story: Jesus, the blind beggar, the disciples, the neighbours, the blind man's parents, and the Pharisees. Put yourself in the position of each one and see what you learn from identifying with them.

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COMMUNION OF SAINTS, AN IMPORTANT TENET OF OUR FAITH, CAN HELP DURING CORONAVIRUS TIMES

Mar 18, 2020 by Daniel P. Horan

Like nearly everybody else on the planet, I have been preoccupied with, concerned about and focused on the novel coronavirus pandemic over the last few weeks. It seems that every hour new information comes across media outlets that would ordinarily be weeklong stories in their own right — professional and college sports are suspended; public liturgies are suppressed by dioceses around the country; travel bans are put into effect; schools from the elementary level to universities have temporarily closed or switched to remote learning; chaos and fear and confusion have ensued.

In the midst of this frightening moment in our history, I considered what more could be said, what perspective could I offer? I am a doctor, but I am not a physician. My expertise in theology and spirituality does not qualify me in any way to add words of wisdom or caution about something best left to epidemiologists and public health specialists. There is enough medical advice (mostly good, though some bogus) already circulating online. But upon considering what I might say in my column this week, I realized that virtually nothing has been said about the theological significance of the communion of saints for this moment.

The doctrine of the communion of saints is an important tenet of our faith but one that few Christians regularly consider. It was added to the Creed sometime around the fifth century, and yet for all its ancient significance it remains largely misunderstood.

Theologian and St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, professor emerita at Fordham University, stated at the outset of her 1998 book, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*, that misconceptions about the doctrine are so prevalent that any effort to talk constructively about the communion of saints requires first identifying what this belief "is not." She explains:

This doctrinal symbol does not in the first instance refer to paradigmatic figures, those outstanding individuals traditionally called "saints," but rather names the whole community of people graced by the Spirit of God. Neither does it point exclusively to those who have died; rather, the community of living persons is its primary referent. Furthermore, while obviously interested in human beings, the symbol does not allude to them exclusively but embraces the whole natural world in a "communion of the holy."

At its core, the communion of saints is an affirmation of the empowering, unifying and healing work of the Holy Spirit among all God's people and creation.

The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, beautifully and succinctly describes the reality of the communion of saints, noting that, "all the faithful, scattered

though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit." A paraphrase of this line also appears in the Roman Missal in Eucharistic Prayer III. Two key elements of the doctrine are expressed in this short line: the role of the Holy Spirit and the communion that people share in the Spirit.

That so few people regularly regard the doctrine of the communion of saints may follow from the fact that so few people care to remember the third person of the Holy Trinity. As I have said before, most Christians generally act as unwitting "Holy Spirit atheists." But that doesn't stop God from being God, and as Spirit, God continually draws near to creation, dwells within each person and leads us onward in salvation history.

The notion of communion (*koinonia* in Greek) is an important concept to grasp in an effort to understand the doctrine. This term does not merely mean affiliation or association of like-minded folks. It is deeper and more foundational. Communion refers to the bonds of fellowship and interrelatedness formed by the Holy Spirit among the people of God. Because the Spirit is not bound by human laws, prejudices, borders, or any form of demarcation we establish among ourselves, the communion that is shared in the Spirit transcends space, time and even earthly life. For this reason, we can profess the Apostles' Creed with confidence, affirming St. Paul's insight in the New Testament that absolutely nothing, including death, can separate us from the love of God or the communion we share with one another in the Holy Spirit.

This has been an unusually difficult series of weeks for nearly everybody on the planet. The best scientific and medical experts have strongly encouraged the practice of social distancing to help mitigate the spread of the coronavirus, which has prompted the remarkable halting of all regular public gatherings. The imposition of quarantines and self-isolation has challenged much of our usual interpersonal connections and interactions. People are now understandably afraid of standing too closely or even interacting with others at all. And in the face of rising fear — and for some, denial — it can be difficult to recall our shared humanity and ground ourselves in what is most important when the quotidian experience of life is halted or flipped upside down.

It is in this context, however, that the communion of saints can be especially instructive. There are at least three implications that are worth reflecting on and remembering during this difficult time.

First, we are already always united to one another in the Holy Spirit. This means that though we may not be able to go about interacting with one another, seeing each other in person, or sharing in real time the ordinary and extraordinary events of our lives, we are still bound to one another and connected to each other by God's grace. This communion is not limited to all those living today, but includes a bond with everyone who has come before us and all those who will come after us in this life. For many people the suspension of public liturgies last weekend was an especially painful experience. But it's worth recalling that no celebration of the Eucharist is ever truly "private," for the doctrine of the communion of saints reminds us that we are already joined together by the Spirit into the body of Christ. You don't have to livestream a liturgy (as wonderful as that option may be) to be connected to and in communion with the church at worship. Separated though we may be from one another physically, spiritually we are in communion — we just have to call that to mind and embrace it with our hearts.

Second, those of us who are not yet ill but embrace social distancing for the sake of the common good are practicing a form of solidarity that is another reflection of our belief in the communion of saints. This solidarity arising from the communion we share in the Spirit should motivate our behaviors so as to help others and not merely look after ourselves. This is especially true when facing the threat of a highly contagious virus.

Sadly, many young adults who feel they are not at risk or are in denial about the seriousness of the threat have disregarded public health recommendations to avoid crowded settings. Even if one is not in a population most at risk, the flagrant disregard for the safety of others — by becoming a vector for the virus and exposing other, more vulnerable people to the disease — is a rejection of the solidarity called for by our profession of belief in the communion of saints. If we believe the Spirit binds us together in fellowship, then we ought to keep in mind that the decisions we make and the behaviors in which we engage have consequences that extend beyond us and may even threaten the lives of our brothers and sisters.

Finally, as theologians have noted for centuries, in addition to meaning "the communion of saints," the Latin phrase in the creed *communio sanctorum* can also mean "communion in holy things." Typically

this has been understood to refer to the sacraments, and understandably so. However, we can also expand the notion of "holy things" to include the whole of creation, which is made holy by God's presence throughout the cosmos precisely as Spirit. Too often we are inclined to limit God's presence to the times, places and things of our choosing. And yet, as scripture bears witness, God's Spirit draws near to all of creation, renewing the face of the earth (Psalm 104). There is no person, place, or thing that is outside of God's reach or purview. Whether we are holed up in a precautionary quarantine or find ourselves isolated in medical treatment or we work in an essential field that prohibits social distancing, God is, as St. Augustine said, always closer to us than we are to ourselves.

During this time when we are inclined to feel under threat and out of control, it is important for us to remember that we are inextricably united to each other in the bond of fellowship through the Holy Spirit. May our recounting of this important Christian doctrine bring us consolation in times of isolation and loneliness, solidarity leading to care of others, and faith in the God who is always already there with us.

[Daniel P. Horan is a Franciscan friar and assistant professor of systematic theology and spirituality at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His most recent book is *Catholicity and Emerging Personhood: A Contemporary Theological Anthropology*. Follow him on Twitter: @DanHoranOFM.]