

## Message for The Solemnity of SS. Peter & Paul 2020

This is quite a momentous day, because with the restoration of public celebrations of Mass next weekend this will be the last of these messages that I will be recording. If I record another, it will mean things have gone wrong and we are being locked down again!

I would like to speak for a while about the arrangements for Mass, and then I will reflect briefly on the beautiful feast that we are celebrating this weekend.

Many of you will know by now that we are permitted to resume celebrating Mass in public from July 4<sup>th</sup>. Lots of people have been working hard to make sure that we can do this safely, and I know that it will be a time of great joy and excitement for you to be able to get to Mass again.

We have decided that we will continue to adopt the 2 metre social distancing at our Masses. We could have reduced it to one metre, but then everyone would have had to wear masks at Mass; you are welcome to wear one if you wish, but at the moment I am reluctant to take decisions that would impose that on everyone. It may be that we choose to go to that in future so that we can fit more people into the churches, I am happy to be led by your preferences on this, we will see, but for now we stay at 2 metres, which means that the numbers that can attend Mass will be limited.

I know that lots of you are desperate to get back to Mass, I understand that – I am desperate to be able to welcome you back. But I know that some of you are anxious about coming out, and others of you are continuing to shield yourselves. It is important that you know that the Sunday obligation to attend Mass remains suspended. So, while we are obliged to keep Sunday as a special day, the Day of Resurrection, and to mark that by acts of prayer and devotion, we are not obliged to be at Mass.

So, I would like to suggest that if you are desperate to get to Mass, but anxious about coming on Sunday; or if the numbers of people wanting to come on Sunday exceed the number we can accommodate, you come on a weekday. The weekdays will probably be less full. We will be returning to pretty well the same usual weekday schedule as before from next weekend, so there will be plenty to choose from, both in Midhurst and Petworth, including one evening Mass (on Friday in Petworth).

In addition to our usual three Sunday morning Masses, to help overcome the restrictions on numbers, there will be an additional temporary Mass in Petworth on a Saturday evening at 5.30pm.

Because of the restrictions on numbers, we are asking you to contact Catherine to let her know which weekend Mass you plan to come to (you don't need to do so with weekdays). You can do that by email or by text, or by leaving a message. This is important because it will help us see if there is a potential overattendance at any of the churches: once we reach capacity we will not be able to let anyone

else in. It is extremely important that we play our part in making sure that the virus does not regain a hold.

From next weekend one of the Masses (usually the Saturday evening Mass) will be recorded and put on the internet. You will be able to find it either by going to our website or direct to our Youtube channel. Hopefully this will enable those of you unable to join us for Mass to feel that you are still a part of the church family.

There will be some changes to the way in which Mass is celebrated, and I will explain these at the start of each Mass. It is very important to me that we keep everyone safe, but also that our Mass is also a reverent and spiritual sacred moment. I will be working on the best way to achieve this over the coming week.

I so much look forward to seeing you at Mass again, whether at the weekend or on a weekday.

Let me turn for a brief moment to this feast of St Peter and St Paul. They were two very different men, but at the same time there are some remarkable similarities between them. In his homily for this feast last year Pope Francis picked up one of these similarities when he says 'Both were cut to the core by questions asked by Jesus'.

Beside the Sea of Tiberias the risen Jesus is having breakfast with his friends. You can sense that beneath the surface of this scene that is on one level mundane, and on another level simply extraordinary, something is building up, something is going to happen. Jesus turns to Peter and asks: 'Simon, Son of John, do you love me?' (Jn 21.15). He asks the question, of course, not because he needs to find out the answer, but because Peter needs to consider and understand what he is being asked. 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you'. Later on, on the road to Damascus, Saul crashes to the ground from his horse and hears the words 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' (Acts 9.4) Both questions mark a moment of conversion, a moment of deep personal change and growth. Both questions make the person hearing them see the world completely differently. Peter realises that the road he has set out on will end up exactly where Jesus ended up; Paul realises that he has been putting all his energy into trying to silence the truth. Two men are transformed by the questions that they hear Jesus ask them. I have been sitting here trying to hear what question he is asking me. He has a question for all of us this weekend. I don't know what yours might be, but I have a hint of what mine is. It is something for me to chew over in this coming week, and beyond. Peter's question from the Lord was 'Do you love me?'. Paul's question was 'Why are you persecuting me?' What's yours?