

PARISH OF ASCOT VALE

ST MARY'S CHURCH, 123 ST LEONARDS ROAD, ASCOT VALE
ST MARGARET'S CHURCH, BARB STREET, MARIBYRNONG

Parish Priest:	Rev Fr Justin Ford
Assistant Priest / Lithuanian Chaplain:	Rev Fr Joseph Deveikis
Presbytery / Parish Office:	123 St Leonards Rd, Ascot Vale (Postal: PO Box 468 Ascot Vale 3032)
Telephone:	9370 6688
Website:	www.stmaryschurch.org.au
Email:	ascotvale@cam.org.au
Office Hours:	Tue – Fri, 10am – 3pm. Parish Secretary: Carmen D’Rosario
Principal, St Mary’s School:	Mr Paul Hogan T: 9370 1194
Principal, St Margaret’s School:	Mr Gavin Brennan T: 9318 1339

Mass

Public Masses are currently suspended. Priests continue to offer Masses personally for the praise and worship of God, for the needs of the faithful and the world, especially the alleviation of the current crisis.

Reconciliation (Confession)

By appointment - no name required. Arrangement will be made for the confession to be anonymous, not face-to-face, with suitable distancing.

Baptisms at St Mary’s

Our normally scheduled Baptisms on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month are currently on hold. However, Baptism will be administered if there is urgent and grave need.

Baptism Information Sessions are also currently on hold. To discuss a future baptism, please ring the parish office during office hours.

Weddings at St Mary’s

6 months’ notice required. For information on weddings please ring the parish office during office hours.

Private prayer in our churches

In accordance with the guidelines of the Archdiocese, our churches are not currently open for private prayer.

Parish Bulletin

The Bulletin will continue to be published, containing the readings for that Sunday for your reflection. This will be uploaded to the parish website on the Saturday morning prior.

5th Sunday of Easter – 10 May 2020

Mother’s Day Prayer

*God our Creator, we pray:
for new mothers, coming to terms with new responsibility;
for expectant mothers, wondering and waiting;
for those who are tired, stressed or depressed;
for those who struggle to balance the tasks of work and family;
for those who are unable to feed their children due to poverty;
for those whose children have physical, mental or emotional disabilities;
for those who raise children on their own;
for those who have lost a child;
for those who care for the children of others;
for those whose children have left home;
and for those whose desire to be a mother has not been fulfilled.
Bless all mothers, that their love may be deep and tender,
and that they may lead their children to know and do what is good,
living not for themselves alone, but for God and for others.
Amen.*

We continue to lift up our prayers to God in the current crisis – praying for all those who have died from COVID-19; for those gravely ill, and all those infected; for health-care workers, leaders, and all those whose work is especially crucial in the present hour; for researchers working towards a vaccine; for all those whose jobs or businesses have been lost or are in jeopardy, and all in financial difficulty; for protection and help for ourselves, our families, our parish, our Church, our nation and all the world.

Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

Recently Deceased: Pasquale Celi; Marcia Sheridan

Anniversaries: Antonio Escano; Anthony Catania

Readings Next Week: 6th Sunday of Easter: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; 1 Pet 3:15-18; Jn 14:15-21

Feast Day: 14 May: St Matthias, Apostle

St Matthias was the apostle chosen to replace Judas, who had hanged himself. (Mt 27:5) In the days between the Ascension and Pentecost, Peter addressed the gathered disciples, about 120 of them: ‘We must therefore choose someone who has been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was travelling around with us...from the time when John was baptising until the day when he was taken up from us – and he can act with us as a witness to his resurrection.’ Two disciples were nominated: Joseph Barsabbas, and Matthias. After praying, they drew lots for a sign of which one was chosen by God, and the lot fell on Matthias to become one of the Twelve. (see Acts 1:15-26) Nothing else is known about him for sure, but various traditions have him preaching in Judaea; Cappadocia [in modern Turkey]; near the Caspian Sea; and in Ethiopia; and being martyred either by crucifixion or beheading.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A – READINGS

FIRST READING

Acts 6:1-7

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom; we will hand over this duty to them, and continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.' The whole assembly approved of this proposal and elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The word of the Lord continued to spread: the number of disciples in Jerusalem was greatly increased, and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 32

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us,
as we place our trust in you.

1. Ring out your joy to the Lord, O you just;
for praise is fitting for loyal hearts.
Give thanks to the Lord upon the harp,
with a ten-stringed lute sing him songs. (R.)
2. For the word of the Lord is faithful
and all his works to be trusted.
The Lord loves justice and right
and fills the earth with his love. (R.)
3. The Lord looks on those who revere him,
on those who hope in his love,
to rescue their souls from death,
to keep them alive in famine. (R.)

SECOND READING

1 Pet 2:4-9

A reading from the first letter of St Peter

The Lord is the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him; set yourselves close to him so that you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones making a spiritual house. As scripture says: See how I lay in Zion a precious cornerstone that I have chosen and the man who rests his trust on it will not be disappointed. That means that for you who are believers, it is precious; but for unbelievers, the stone

rejected by the builders has proved to be the keystone, a stone to stumble over, a rock to bring men down. They stumble over it because they do not believe in the word; it was the fate in store for them.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

I am the way, the truth, and the life, says the Lord;
no one comes to the Father, except through me.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Jn 14:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to his disciples:

'Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Trust in God still, and trust in me.

There are many rooms in my Father's house;
if there were not, I should have told you.

I am now going to prepare a place for you,
and after I have gone and prepared you a place,
I shall return to take you with me;
so that where I am you may be too.

You know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

Jesus said: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.
No one can come to the Father except through me.
If you know me, you know my Father too.
From this moment you know him and have seen him.'

Philip said, 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied.'

'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,'
said Jesus to him 'and you still do not know me?

'To have seen me is to have seen the Father,
so how can you say, "Let us see the Father"?'
Do you not believe

that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself:

it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work.

You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father
and the Father is in me; believe it on the evidence of
this work, if for no other reason.

'I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me
will perform the same works as I do myself,
he will perform even greater works,
because I am going to the Father.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

***Missing the Mass and the Sacraments in the time of crisis:
Are we losing out spiritually? And what happened to the Sunday Obligation?***

Amidst the current crisis, and the different sufferings it has brought for many, Catholics have striven to continue their practice of faith – by special prayers, reflection on the Sunday readings, and praying along with livestreamed and televised Masses. Yet there remains the pain of being unable to physically attend Mass, or even pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

It helps us empathise with those for whom, through illness, that is always the situation. But we also recall how, when we do our best in these circumstances that God himself has willed to permit, to a great extent he takes our desire or intention as equivalent to the reality. Many have learnt, for example, of Spiritual Communion: when it's impossible for us to receive Holy Communion, we can devoutly express to God our *desire* of receiving, if that were possible; and that brings so many of the graces we would have had from actually receiving.

It also applies to the forgiveness of mortal sin. Although in our own parish, the Sacrament of Reconciliation continues to be available upon request (and kept anonymous, to facilitate this for penitents), there are parts of the world where access to the Sacrament has become more difficult. But when someone has perfect contrition (i.e. sorrow for sin arising from supernatural charity, the virtue by which God is loved above all things), and with that, is firmly resolved to confess sacramentally as soon as possible: then forgiveness is obtained even before the actual confession. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 1452) (The desire/intention of the Sacrament, indeed, is included within supernatural charity: if we love God above all things then we intend to do his will, at the very least in all grave matters; and his will is, that we sacramentally confess all our mortal sins.)

The word 'perfect' in *perfect contrition* doesn't mean that our contrition must be of the greatest possible intensity. Rather, it simply means that our contrition is animated / completed / 'perfected' by supernatural charity. It is charity abiding in our souls that directs our actions to God, our Last End. Charity always goes hand in hand with sanctifying grace. If we die with grace and charity in our souls we will most certainly reach heaven (whether immediately, or through the purification of purgatory); whereas if we die without grace and charity, we can never reach heaven. This is the decisive factor. (This has no exceptions for any human being. Grace is the seed of heavenly life, and we must have received it into our hearts when we reach the end of *this* life.)

So someone who has fallen into mortal sin (and therefore lost grace and charity) should make an act of perfect contrition as soon as possible, so as to be forgiven and be restored to grace – just in case, before they can confess, death takes them unexpectedly and their soul is lost. To make an act of perfect contrition, we should ask God's help (since grace and charity are his gift), and reflect on how our sins have offended him, the One who is infinitely good and perfect; our sins even crucified Jesus, God the Son. These reflections lead us to be sorry for our sins, and to be firmly resolved never again to commit mortal sin, from the motivation of the love of God.

By contrast, *imperfect* contrition (sorrow for sin motivated by fear of hell or the ugliness of sin) does not by itself obtain forgiveness of mortal sin. It is still a good thing and a gift of God, but it opens us to forgiveness only in the actual reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, not beforehand. (*Catechism* n. 1453) That is why the Sacrament itself can be absolutely necessary for salvation, for those lacking perfect contrition. (And this is a primary reason why priests must do their best to always ensure the accessibility of the Sacrament for all.) Reconciliation also gives any sinner more sure confidence of forgiveness, since no one can be fully certain of having perfect contrition, animated by grace and charity – grace, being supernatural, is beyond the grasp of direct human experience. Whereas, we *do* know that when we worthily receive the Sacrament, grace is certainly imparted.

What about participation in the Mass in these times (as distinct from receiving Communion)? Doubtless, some benefits come only by our actual presence. But when, as now, we can't attend physically, yet have the *desire* to attend were it possible; when we unite ourselves to the Masses that *are* being offered, taking part online or on TV – then God will surely give us so many of the graces we would have received by being physically present. United with the priest, the faithful attending a Mass 'offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it' (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 11); but those unable to be there physically can still make that offering spiritually.

Concerning the *obligation* of Sunday Mass (which as we're aware, we're currently released from, except priests), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives the basic principles: 'The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.' (n. 2181; cf. St John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* ('On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy') (1998) 47)

The *Catechism* also explains (nn. 1857; 1861) how mortal sin requires grave matter (as is present in the case of deliberately skipping Sunday Mass without a serious reason); full knowledge; and full consent. So it does follow (as has traditionally been held) that with these conditions fulfilled, for a Catholic to culpably skip Sunday Mass does indeed place their salvation in jeopardy. To go to heaven, they must repent of their mortal sin and gain God's forgiveness (as explained above, concerning contrition and Reconciliation).

This can seem shocking or incredible to people who measure the gravity of a sin just by their own emotional response to it, or by 'what their friends are doing' – rather than by the truth of God's will. Attending Sunday Mass is not just some 'optional devotion' but as the *Catechism* says, 'the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice'. When we're aware of God's will in a serious matter such as this, but deliberately reject it, we choose to no longer love God *above all things*, but rather, to love our own will more. And so, supernatural charity is expelled from our soul – without which, heaven is impossible.

Still, especially in times of widespread religious ignorance, it could often be the case that Catholics are unaware through no fault of their own of the gravity of their obligation to attend Sunday [or Saturday night] Mass. And so, with this condition of full knowledge lacking, they would not be guilty of mortal sin. We remember, however, that we also have an obligation to *seek the truth* about God's will. It is possible then that someone's responsibility is simply pushed one step further back – the responsibility of not having sufficiently sought the truth in the first place. (So: all these are the principles, but God alone judges whether an individual has violated them.)

The *divine* law to keep the Lord's Day holy always obliges (and so even in this crisis, we must still find ways to sanctify our Sunday); but the requirement that we do this *by attending Mass* is a *Church* law (noting, however, that God obliges Catholics to normally obey Church laws). The obligation of attending ceases: (1) when it is simply impossible; (2) by dispensation by Church authority; or (3) from a grave excusing reason.

All three currently apply: (1) there is no Mass to attend, no matter how we tried; (2) the Archbishop has dispensed us; and (3) even if Masses were available and no dispensation had been given, the health risks of these times (to ourselves or others) could constitute a serious excusing reason (depending on the situation). For some laws indeed, God expects us to risk or even lose our lives, but attending Sunday Mass is not one of these; and so even notable ordinary illness excuses, and there is no sin whatsoever.

Watching Mass online or on TV, while very commendable, and a highly suitable way of following God's command to keep the Lord's Day holy if we

can't possibly get to Mass, never fulfils the *Church law obligation* of actually physically attending. Reiterating, that obligation to attend is, rather, simply non-existent if we *can't* reasonably get there; and not fulfilled by online Mass if we *can* get there.

By the same token, watching Mass online never binds under pain of sin, strictly speaking, whether or not physical attendance is possible. In these circumstances when we can't attend, we might still be keeping our Sunday holy in some other way. Yet, online Mass could be very important in our present situation to maintain us in the *habit* of keeping Sunday holy *at a specific moment* and *for a specific length of time* – an important habit for that day when we will again be obliged to attend church.

The present crisis gives Catholics a choice: to advance or fall back. Some will use the opportunity to appreciate the Eucharist more deeply, and to develop their own initiative in the spiritual life. But others might become accustomed to not keeping the Lord's Day holy at all. When the crisis ends, they may think, 'I've done well enough without Mass all these months, and it was quite nice having my Sundays free. It turned out it wasn't obligatory after all, all those months, so I guess it's not really an obligation even now the crisis is over'. And so they fall away, with grave risk to salvation. They judge the benefit of the Mass just from the felt benefits to themselves – not seeing all the hidden benefits, and overlooking that we primarily attend not simply for ourselves, but for the adoration and thanks we owe and give *to God*.

As for the obligation, they would deceive themselves to think it hadn't returned, since the three factors of impossibility, dispensation or serious excuse would no longer exist. The crisis has indeed highlighted that the obligation of keeping Sunday holy specifically *by Mass attendance* is as we said a Commandment of the Church (and so, able to be dispensed by the Church) – rather than God's law directly. Yet God still commands us to obey such laws under pain of sin (and indeed, mortal sin in this instance), since Christ gave lawmaking authority to Peter and the Apostles, and to their successors the Popes and Bishops: 'Whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven.' (*Mt* 16:19; 18:18; cf. First Vatican Council, DS 3060, on the moral obligation of obedience to the Pope as a truth of Catholic Faith.)

We return to the centrality of the Mass – which is, in truth, the Sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuated down the ages: the fixed axis amidst all upheavals. So unite your hearts with the priests who continue to offer the Holy Sacrifice daily – giving perfect praise, adoration and thanks to God; interceding for the needs of the faithful and the world; winning graces, atoning for sins, releasing souls into heaven. May we all keep our desire for the Mass burning in our hearts, until the joyful day comes when we can again gather to worship God in the Most Holy Sacrifice.