

Dear Parishioners,

I hope you are all keeping well, physically and mentally! Here we are, approaching the end of May and the Coronavirus is still with us. Our hearts go out to the families of our parish who have lost loved ones in the last few weeks. We assure them of our prayers for those who have died.

When the lockdown began several weeks ago there was a great sense that we were in this together. Spirits were quite high really and we were all very kind to one another. But the novelty of it all has worn off a bit now. We've had enough and want to get back to normal. If that's how you're feeling at the moment, don't worry. We all are. Have you noticed that people are beginning to get a bit tetchy with one another? We're tired. It's taking a lot more effort at the moment to keep spirits up and to stay charitable. Let's pray for one another and ask our Lord for the Grace we need.

We aren't the first generation to live in a time of plague. We all learned in school about the Black Death and about the Great Plague of 1665. I don't remember hearing about the plague of 686AD but there was one. It devastated the north of England and all but wiped out the monastic community at Jarrow. Only two monks survived, the elderly Abbot Ceolfrith and a boy of about thirteen or fourteen not long in the community. Determined that the praises of God should not cease, the old man and the young lad went into the Abbey church. From one side of the Choir the Abbot intoned, 'Deus in adiutorium meum intende' (O God, come to my aid) and from the other side the boy's voice answered, 'Domine ad adiuvandam me festina' (O Lord, make haste to help me). And so the 'Work of God' went on. The teenager's name was Bede. We celebrate his feast day this week.

Bede lived the rest of his life at Jarrow, only leaving the monastery once. But his imagination and intellect ranged far and wide. Most people think of him as 'The Father of English History' because of his book, 'The Ecclesiastical History of the English People.' Catholics honour him not only as a saint but also as the only English 'Doctor of the Church'. His commentaries on Sacred Scripture are still read today. He also knew an awful lot about geography and wrote about botany too.

He was though, first and last, a monk. He loved his brothers and they loved him. You can hear the emotion in the voice of the monk who wrote the account of his death:

'When it came to the Tuesday before Ascension Day, Bede's breathing became very much worse and a slight swelling had appeared in his feet... At three o'clock (on the Wednesday) he said to me, 'Run quickly and fetch the priests of our monastery... I did so, and when they came, he spoke to each one singly, urging and begging them to offer Masses and prayers regularly on his behalf. But they were sad, and they all wept, especially because he had said that he thought they would not see his face much longer in this world. Yet they rejoiced at one thing he said: "It is time, if it so please my Maker, that I should be released from the body and return to Him Who formed me out of nothing when as yet I was not. I have lived a long time, and the righteous Judge has well provided for me all my life long." So upon the floor of his cell, singing "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit", he breathed his last. And well may we believe without hesitation that, inasmuch as he had laboured here always in the praise of God, so his soul journeyed to the joys of heaven which he longed for.'

Now it falls to us to keep the praises of God going during our own time of plague. The

Mass is still offered every day. And you are offering a daily sacrifice of prayer in your own homes. Our Lord loves you for it. Try to unite your prayer with the Mass. You can do that at any time of day because at each moment, somewhere in the world, a priest is elevating the Sacred Host. Mentally place all your intentions, and especially your love of God, on the altar. Together with St Bede we say: 'You have taught me from my youth, O Lord, and I proclaim Your wonders still.' (Psalm 71)

God bless you,

Father O'Shea