



UNITED

DIOCESE OF PALMERSTON NORTH

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26th March 2020

Kia tau te rangimarie ki a koutou,

Greetings to all of you in the Dioceses of Wellington and Palmerston North.

In my lifetime I have never experienced anything like what New Zealand and the rest of the world is currently dealing with. I don't think that even a week ago any of us would have imagined that we would be at ALERT LEVEL FOUR for the COVID 19 virus. Alert Level Four is serious, we are all called to do our bit to stay safe and to protect others.

I want to share with you a couple of thoughts from Scripture.

We are still in Lent, and maybe this new situation gives us an opportunity in our isolation to be prayerful and reflective, and to ponder deeply on where we are with God at the moment. Even in Lent we can jump to Pentecost and reflect on Mary and the disciples in the Upper Room. They were anxious and wondering what was going to happen to them, they were scared. Many of us are scared and anxious at this time too. We know that "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:4) This can be a time of prayer for us too as we are already filled with the Holy Spirit, although we may not have that awareness among the turmoil at the moment. The Spirit of God enables us to be calm and at peace. As we have entered this lockdown Level, we can also remember the words of Jesus after the Resurrection "Peace be with you." (John 20 :21). In prayer imagine Jesus standing before you and saying, "Peace be with you."

My favourite verse in the Gospel is also from John where Jesus invites us "Remain in my love." (John 15:9) During this time please do all you can to "remain in his love" and to be aware of his Spirit within you. We are not just remaining at home, we are remaining/staying with Jesus. Doing that will enable all of us to look forward in hope with the expectation of meeting up again with our families and friends, our work colleagues and associates.

As we think of that Pentecost scene, I ask you to think ahead to this coming Pentecost (Sunday 31st May). We have no idea what New Zealand, or the rest of the world, will be like by then, but whatever happens we have an incredible chance to do something different. The week before Pentecost is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The theme of this year's Week of Prayer, is "They showed us unusual kindness" (Acts 28:2).

In these challenging times we still have the chance "to show unusual kindness." These unusual times call us to respond with unusual kindness, to go out of our way to be kind to those who are isolated, anxious, lonely, ill or suffering a bereavement. It is good to look after our fellow parishioners, but we are people called to mission. The people in our street, workmates, extended family and especially those who are struggling all need "unusual kindness". Foodbanks and community organizations need our help to help others, even if our help must be given as dollars rather than goods during this time. Their social workers, including our own at Catholic Social Services and ACROSS are still responding to family needs using technology, and they are working very hard. The Compassion Soup Kitchen is an essential service and will be open throughout the emergency. Help them if you can and if you are able to alleviate the financial stress of any family even in a small and informal way then do that act of "unusual kindness".



I have sent out a lot of information in the last few days, and at times it may have seemed too much, but it has been necessary to be clear and direct in order to try to protect every one of you, and to help you see the responsibility we all have to stop the spread of the virus.

Many resources are available to help us pray and reflect. We cannot pray in our own faith communities at this time, but we can pray in our homes. As we stay at home for at least four weeks in order to “flatten the curve” of infections, I am asking you to join me twice a day over these weeks, at mid-morning (10.30am) and mid-afternoon (3pm) - morning and afternoon tea time to pause and pray. I am not asking for any special prayer, but I will be pausing at those times to respond to the invitation of Jesus to “remain in my love.” This can be an act of solidarity for all of us as we reflect on the unbelievable fact that we are already filled with the Holy Spirit and we have the chance to show “unusual kindness.”

Many people are sad that they cannot participate in Mass. The New Zealand Bishops have dispensed you from the obligation of Sunday Mass. This could be a time in our homes to reflect more deeply on the Sunday Scriptures, and the Gospel in particular, perhaps to devise liturgies for your household. The Church has a great treasure in Lectio Divina - why not look up a website and learn to use this treasure, to grow closer to God and to one another?

Last Sunday (22nd March) at his Angelus message Pope Francis said “To the pandemic caused by the virus, we want to respond with the universality of prayer, of compassion, of tenderness. Let us remain united. Let us make our closeness felt toward those persons who are the most lonely and tried. Our closeness to the doctors, the healthcare workers, nurses, volunteers... Our closeness to the authorities who must impose stringent measures, but for our own good. Our closeness to the police, to the soldiers who try always to keep order on the streets, to ensure that the things the government asks to be done for the good of all are implemented. Closeness to all.” As we reflect on the words of Pope Francis, we let them both challenge and change us.

I often ask myself how I will know if I am growing in prayerfulness and Christian charity. Inevitably I conclude that I will be making progress if I see more and more of the fruits of the Holy Spirit present in my life. I hope that during and after this period of isolation I will be more of a person of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, trustfulness and self-control.

I assure you all that you are in my prayers and thoughts during these days.

With every good wish and blessing

Naku Noa



+John

John Cardinal Dew
Archbishop of Wellington
Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Palmerston North.

