

## Weekly Message from Fr William for the Fifth Sunday of Lent 2021

Dear People of St Mary's, this time last year, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020, churches throughout the diocese were closed for the first time on the instruction of the Bishop, in line with the National Bishops Conference and churches throughout the country. This was in anticipation of the national lockdown declared by Boris the next day on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

That same Sunday we had our first recorded Sunday mass that went out on the website. It wasn't livestream, just a recording. The same recording could be 'watched' at Sat 6pm or Sun 10am or Sun 5pm or in fact at any other time. With mass in the can I remember I had a much more leisurely Sunday morning that day... and for the next two Sundays! We didn't get up and running with livestream until Easter Sunday, bringing us back together just in time for Easter, so that we could celebrate the mass together again as a parish, albeit virtually.

And I guess this must be my 52<sup>nd</sup> or 53<sup>rd</sup> weekly message like this, keeping you informed what's happening in the parish during and between successive lockdowns.

As before, and throughout, we've been planning ahead for different situations, but taking decisions only one week at a time about when we will open for in-church participation in the mass. Next Sunday, Palm Sunday, I'll set out in this weekly message and on the bulletin arrangements for Holy Week and Easter. I think it is unlikely we will re-introduce in-church participation this soon. I listen daily to the government and health authority briefings as I have done throughout, and the current message is that despite a phenomenal vaccine roll-out in this country, and a national R value between 0.6 and 0.8, the situation is still 'fragile', and the nation is being urged at the moment not to relax controls/restrictions. At this point in time we also haven't yet seen data on the effect of schools re-opening on 8<sup>th</sup> March.

I think we also could cash in on the lead Bishop Marcus gave us for Christmas. With his lead and encouragement we rediscovered a heightened awareness that Christmas is not just a day, but a season, and we extended our in-church celebration of Christmas masses through the 12 days of Christmas. Easter too is more than just a day. Easter too is a season. And it is almost certainly true that the deeper we get into the Easter season the safer it will be to have in-church celebrations of Easter Masses. But I know too there is something special about the First Sunday of Easter.

Meanwhile our singers and instrumentalists have been working in recent weeks to put together recordings for Holy Week and Easter in case we should need them.



Fifth Sunday of Lent 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021