

# Loving God and loving our neighbours

in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

*'For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'*

(Romans 8:39)

*'He did not say: 'You shall not be tempest-tossed, you shall not be work weary, you shall not be discomforted'. But He said: 'You shall not be overcome'. God wants us to heed those words so that we shall always be strong in trust, both in sorrow and in joy...  
All shall be well, and all shall be well,  
and all manner of thing shall be well.'*

(Julian of Norwich, who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century, through times of plague and famine)

## **‘Nothing can separate us...’**

Perhaps you find it hard to pray at home? You aren’t alone in this, but we hope this booklet will help.

Being stuck at home can be boring, frustrating, or lonely, even if there are other people in the house with you! And if you are very unwell, or worried you might become so, it can be frightening, too. God is with us in these situations, whether we are conscious of his presence or not. Remembering this, and relying on him in prayer, can help you to keep going.

In normal circumstances, we are very happy to arrange for sick or housebound people to have communion at home, but where quarantine / self-isolation rules are in place, unfortunately this won’t be possible. But *Common Worship* reminds us in its liturgy for the sick that “Believers who cannot physically receive the sacrament are to be assured that they are partakers by faith of the body and blood of Christ and of the benefits he conveys to us by them.” Illness – or self-isolation – can’t separate us from Jesus’ love.

We hope this booklet will give you some ideas about how to maintain and deepen your faith and your prayers. God wants us to turn to him in all our troubles and perplexities, even if we can’t always find the “right words”. And remember - the rest of the church is praying for you!

***with love and prayers from all at St Mary and St Margaret Church***

If you find yourself isolated at home, if you’re aware of someone else who needs support, or if you have some time to be available to help others, please get in touch with:

**Rev Mark (0121 7302801) Sam (0121 7471270)**

# 'Self-Isolating for Dummies!'

from Sr Catherine Wybourne, aka '@digitalnun'

How often have you toyed with the idea of becoming a hermit for a few days or dwelt lovingly on the thought that if everybody would just go away for a while and leave you in peace, everything would be perfect? Anyone who has ever tried the experiment knows we carry our demons within, and whether the desert we escaped to was real or imaginary, the one person we cannot flee is ourself. But what if you are now faced with 'self-isolating' or being quarantined for a fortnight along with others? Not so much being alone with the Alone as alone with a crowd — especially if the crowd is your nearest and dearest, your family? How will you fare? How will you even survive without committing murder? Time to call in the experts! Nuns are uniquely experienced in this business of living in a small space with companions who sometimes get on our nerves as much as we do theirs. So, here is Digitalnun's guide to self-isolating for dummies.

First, accept the inevitable. We are going to be cooped up together for a while and it isn't going to be easy. It will help if we have made some preparations beforehand. These include, if possible,

- enough stores of food and household goods to last a fortnight (but don't go overboard: we deprive others if we stockpile);
- a menu plan;
- a routine which includes times for work, relaxation, silence, conviviality and, if a Christian, prayer;
- enough books, music, videos or whatever you and your family need to ensure that you do not spend too much time bickering over trifles;
- an emergency plan for obtaining help if needed;

· an emergency plan for giving help if needed. You probably think this is all very basic and obvious. Of course it is. Much of monastic life is basic and obvious. Benedict was well aware of the stresses and strains of community life and sketched out in his Rule ways of coping with them. He was realistic enough to know we can be tempted to murder one another, especially when we cannot get away from other people; he understood the importance of routine and settling questions of what we are to eat and when to avoid making them the focus of disputes when there is not enough to occupy us. He recognized that silence is necessary not only to our spiritual health but also to our general well-being and can prove a healing balm in difficult situations. He realised, too, that we must have work to do (even if it is just decluttering a cupboard). Above all, he placed great emphasis on putting the needs of others first, of apologizing when things have gone wrong and not allowing feuds to simmer or grumbles to destroy the peace of the group.

I wonder if we can tease out that last point, about putting the needs of others first, a little more? Some people have expended a lot of effort and even anger in trying to play down the seriousness of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. In addition to pouring scorn on those who are anxious about themselves or their families, some have attacked policies designed to protect everyone from the virus. If one is in good health and certain of access to an ICU and ventilator should need arise, one could well argue that there is nothing to worry about — for oneself. But one's neighbour with asthma or some other illness, the elderly person living alone down the road, or the citizen of a country with a practically non-existent healthcare system, what about them? And becoming indignant about the precautions we are asked to take in church for the sake of others, what does that say about us?

This is where I think the reason some of us become nuns and adopt a solitary life lived in community becomes highly relevant. We do so in

order to become more filled with love of God and neighbour, more selfless, more Christ-like. We may not be very good at it, but everything in the monastery is designed to help us. Being forced into self-isolating or quarantine and all that goes with it may well be contrary to everything we desire or think right for us, but it is imposed on us for the good of others. We can learn from it. We can turn what at first sight seems a negative experience into a positive one. We can rediscover what it means to live simply; we can experience what it is like to live without access to the Sacraments or the social/work communities on which we rely for much of our daily interaction; we may even rediscover some of the joys of family life or, if we live alone, the joys of solitude. We can confront some of our inner demons and maybe conquer them. We can end up less of a dummy than we were before.

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*Almighty God,  
you see that we have no power of ourselves  
to help ourselves:  
keep us both outwardly in our bodies,  
and inwardly in our souls;  
that we may be defended from all adversities  
which may happen to the body,  
and from all evil thoughts  
which may assault and hurt the soul;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*(Common Worship,  
Post-communion Prayer for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent)*

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## 4 Golden Rules for loving our neighbours...

1. **Each one of us can think about how we can protect and support our neighbours.** So much of the public rhetoric is sowing fear about the danger of other people. So, taking all the official precautions, offer help and reassurance to others – and don't demonise anyone or any group.
2. **Think about who may be suffering more than me.** For those of us who are healthy there is much less to worry about but the elderly, the housebound and those with chronic health conditions may be very anxious. **Think about who you can put in a daily phone call to, especially those who are particularly vulnerable.** There's nothing like a friendly voice to offer solace when someone is worried. A smile can bring cheer, even on the phone. If you visit, follow all the official precautions or don't go.
3. **Don't give into panic and start hoarding food.** There is plenty to go around, so practise the Christian discipline of sharing. Ask your neighbours what they need and do your best to help them get it. If you are self-isolating you will of course need some supplies.
4. **Live today to the full.** None of us ever know what the future holds. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6. 25 – 34), Jesus challenged his followers to live each day fully and not be afraid. Every time we are tempted to give in to fear we need to make a conscious choice to respond in trust and openness."

*(from St Alban's CofE diocese)*

## **Pandemic**

What if you thought of it  
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—  
the most sacred of times?  
Cease from travel.  
Cease from buying and selling.  
Give up, just for now,  
on trying to make the world  
different than it is.  
Sing. Pray. Touch only those  
to whom you commit your life.  
Center down.

And when your body has become still,  
reach out with your heart.  
Know that we are connected  
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.  
(You could hardly deny it now.)  
Know that our lives  
are in one another's hands.  
(Surely, that has come clear.)  
Do not reach out your hands.  
Reach out your heart.  
Reach out your words.  
Reach out all the tendrils  
of compassion that move, invisibly,  
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—  
for better or for worse,  
in sickness and in health,  
so long as we all shall live.

—Lynn Ungar 11/3/20

# **Bible readings for the next few weeks**

Week beginning 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent)

- Exodus 17:1-7
- Psalm 95
- Romans 5:1-11
- John 4:5-42

Week beginning 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020 (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent)

- 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- Psalm 23
- Ephesians 5:8-14
- John 9:1-41

Week beginning 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent)

- Ezekiel 37:1-14
- Psalm 130
- Romans 8:6-11
- John 11:1-45

Week beginning 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 (Palm Sunday)

- Matthew 21:1-11
- Isaiah 50:4-9
- Psalm 31:9-18
- Philippians 2:5-11
- Matthew 26:14 – 27:end

Week beginning 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020 (Easter Day)

- Jeremiah 31:1-6
- Psalm 118:1-24
- Colossians 3:1-4
- Acts 10:34-43
- Matthew 28:1-10
- John 20:1-18

## Simple Forms of Prayer

- Lighting a candle before you pray can help you to focus and listen.
- Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer so that we would always have words to say. Use it!
- The "Examen". Don't let the name put you off! This is a very simple way to prayerfully review your day with God in five steps:
  1. Become aware of God's presence, or ask God to help you remember he's there with you.
  2. Review the day with gratitude (as best you can!)
  3. Pay attention to how you're feeling about it.
  4. Choose one feature of the day and pray about it.
  5. Look toward tomorrow. What do you expect the day to hold? Ask God to help you remember he's with you.
- Lectio Divina: again, if this is new to you, don't let the name put you off. Lectio helps you to read the Bible in a prayerful way. Pick a short passage of Scripture (it can be anything you like, but if you're stuck, parables of Jesus or the shorter Psalms are a good choice). Read it through, slowly, two or three times. Notice what jumps out at you, and ask yourself, what is God saying to me here? Reflect on this for a few minutes. Then, read the passage again. Now ask yourself, what do I want to say to God? - then say it. Lastly, sit quietly and know that God is with you.

## Creative Ways of Praying

- You might find it helpful to listen to favourite hymns or worship songs, or other pieces of music that have a special meaning for you.
- Pictures can help prompt our prayers - for instance photos of loved ones, maps or pictures of our community or the wider world
- If the news is getting you down, try praying for the people and situations that are mentioned.
- Why not try doodling, painting, or drawing as you pray?

## Online Resources

- You can find services of Morning, Midday, Evening, and Night Prayer from the Church of England online at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-daily-prayer>, arranged for you with the readings of the day. There is also an app you can download to your smartphone or tablet (follow the link on the web page or search for “daily prayer” in your app store and look for the blue and white logo). Choose whether to pray in modern language, or to use the Book of Common Prayer. “Prayer During the Day” is the shortest and simplest of the services, morning and evening prayer have the longest portions of Scripture.
- An Ordinary Office: <http://anordinaryoffice.org.uk/>. “An Ordinary Office” is designed to be very accessible (you can follow it through text, symbol, audio, or video). Easy to pray if you’re unwell or very tired. Morning, midday, and evening prayer, plus “nocturnes” for those who can’t sleep.

- The Northumbria Community:  
<https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/offices/how-to-use-daily-office/>. Short but poetic forms of daily prayer in the “Celtic” style.
- Pray As You Go: <https://pray-as-you-go.org/>. A short (11-12 minutes) daily act of prayer and worship, available online or as a tablet and smartphone app (search for “pray as you go” in your app store and look for the headphone logo). This easy to use, beautifully produced site uses music and pictures to help you pray and reflect with a passage of Scripture. Follows the Roman Catholic calendar, but widely used by Christians of all traditions. There are also special seasonal meditations.
- Word Live:  
<https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive/living-faith>. Daily Bible study and prayer points from Scripture Union. Linked to a Facebook group where you can share your thoughts and prayers with other Christians.

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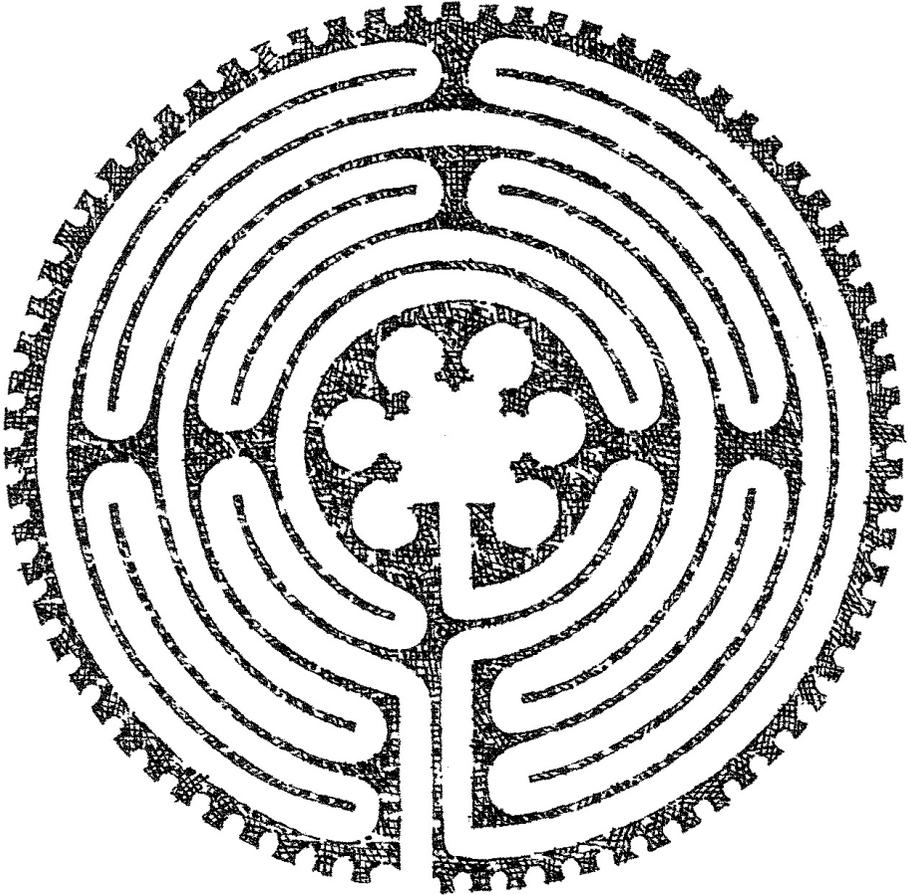
*God of healing and hope,  
in Jesus you meet us in our places of pain and fear.  
Look with mercy on those who have contracted the virus,  
on any who are vulnerable, and on all who feel in danger.  
Through this time of global concern,  
by your Holy Spirit bring out the best not the worst in us.  
Make us more aware  
of our interdependence on each other,  
and on the strength that comes from being one body in you.  
Through Christ our wounded healer. Amen.*

*(Sam Wells)*

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## A Prayer Labyrinth

You might find it helpful to 'walk' the labyrinth by tracing it with your finger as you pray.



*[Introduction, 'Simple', 'Creative' & Online resources & prayer labyrinth  
shared by Rev Dr Jo Kershaw of the North Wakefield Benefice]*