**MASS FOR THE SICK AND THEIR FAMILIES**

**NHS FRONT-LINE WORKERS AND THOSE WORKING IN SOCIAL CARE**

**JUNE 2020**

**CATHEDRAL**

**Dear Friends:**

**The Lord Jesus teaches us by his life and by the words of the Gospel, that our deeds are more important than a passing sentiment: *our actions speak louder than words*.**

**This evening, as we approach the Lord Jesus at the altar, we give thanks to God for his works of grace during these last three months. As we gather virtually this evening - on behalf of the Church in East Anglia - I would like to thank all those who have responded to God’s call to “*love each other with a profound respect.”* You have responded generously to those in need by dutiful service and humble sacrifice.**

**To all nurses, doctors, clinical professionals, care workers, and all who perform essential tasks for our hospitals, care homes, hospices, and shelters to care for the victims of the pandemic: thank you.**

**To all voluntary workers who care for those in need, often hidden and without recompense; to those who have worked tirelessly to help alleviate the practical, psychological and spiritual needs of the lonely, the isolated and the forgotten: thank you.**

**To all the volunteer workers in our parishes who have helped and served the marginalised and those in most need, the clergy and chaplaincy workers, funeral directors and those who work for those who have died, for their care and service for the dead and for those who grieve: thank you.**

***Above all*, however, at this holy sacrifice of the Mass – the supreme act of thanksgiving to God who *is the creator of all things, and who loves everything that he has created* – the entire Church of God, in heaven and earth, presents *you* to Almighty God, you who are children of his love. We thank him for the gift of you, and to ask him to fill you with the graces of perseverance, consolation, and courage. We ask him to strengthen within you the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. You have responded to the call of the apostle: “rejoice with those who rejoice and be sad with those in sorrow.”**

**It can be very easy in time of profound collective trauma to get *stuck in a rut*, to become overwhelmed and disoriented by pain, confusion and the apparent need to solve all the world’s problems at once. We forget too easily that God is the one in charge of everything, and, even though we are his beloved children, we are not ourselves almighty.**

**When we build or rebuild ourselves, our society, our institutions, entirely upon human achievement and upon human power, the building is quickly knocked down by the storms and the waves when they come. And these storms come to every single age in human history. We are no different in what we face than our ancestors. And trials will come, also, to future generations.**

**The land moves beneath our feet *now*, because we have been building our house on sand. And the house sinks, not because human achievement and power are useless, but because we human beings are simply unable to carry the world, its sufferings, its past and current sins *upon our weak shoulders*. Only Jesus Christ – *the Man who is God* – can do that; he *has* done that, on the Cross. Not only that: he rose from the dead so that we aren’t left cold in the ground, with nowhere to go. And this is true as much in our own unique life stories as it is for wider society.**

**The only real, lasting and invincible foundation for our house is God: not a capricious or distant superhero in the sky, but the simple, unchanging and perfect being whose love has overflowed and brought to birth our world, and our human family: *you and me*.**

**When trials *do* come, the apostle reminds us that we should not give up, but instead stick to prayer.**

**Prayer is not asking God to do what I want him to do, plea-bargaining. Prayer is about placing ourselves in right relationship with him, our creator, our father and our brother. Prayer to God –*speaking with God* – is not a last resort, but part of that firm foundation. Because in speaking with God, in making friends with him, we allow his grace to build up the virtues of faith, hope and love within us.**

**Faith gives us the confidence and conviction that *God means what he says* when he makes promises, because the Lord “teaches with authority.”**

**Hope anchors us in the *content* of what he has promised us – that is, ultimately, eternal joy. “If you have hope, this will make your cheerful,” because we aren’t paralysed by the fear of death.**

**Love – or charity – moves us always to see what is good at a deep level, “treating everyone with equal kindness.” It bears fruit in goodness, generosity, humility and worship of the ultimate good, God himself.**

**These are firm foundations – the only foundations that really matter in our individual lives, and for human civilisation. They matter not only to religious people, to believers. Religion – *humanity responding to the reality of God* – is not an amusement arcade, an optional extra, an eccentric hobby. In our Christian language, faith, hope and charity, and the exercise of these grace-filled virtues, are the yeast which raises society up, and stops it from sinking.**

**The world is not over yet, though our circumstances have changed in many ways. This happens all the time. The human story is not static.**

**For many of our dear family and friends, *this* world *has* ended. We entrust all the dead to the love of God, whose heart was pierced with a lance that we might shelter in his loving warmth. They are no longer with *us*. But this world is not all that there is. They have now entered into eternal life with God, where we, too, hope to follow in his good time.**

**We pray that those who mourn the dead might be comforted by God’s promises, and by the love of those around them.**

**Dear friends: may the Lord God give you peace, heal your wounds, and support you on the only worthwhile foundation, his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.**