

Readings: Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-8; Psalm 15; James 1:17-18,21-22,27; Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23.

Dear Parishioners,

Kia ora koutou katoa. Welcome to the 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time.

I hope this note finds you all well and safe. Honestly, it's very sad to experience an empty Church again. But I always pray and remember all of you and your families in my daily prayers and Mass in our Church. Sadly, I don't know when we'll be back to normal and celebrate the Holy Eucharist together again as a Parish.

Possibly, another two weeks in Level 4 lockdown is not easy for everyone. However, we have to be patient, trust the correct judgement of our pure conscience and always make the right decision at this challenging time. Remember Warkworth is not far from us. I believe that despite all the disappointments nothing can stop us from praying for our country and for each other. Nothing can prevent us from sharing the Divine Word of God as a family at home, hoping for a best outcome.

In this unpleasant situation, I'm sure this Sunday's readings strengthen us in faith and hope. Deuteronomy reminds us that God is always near us whenever we call to Him and to honour Him is not by multiplying 'do's and 'don'ts,' but by serving Him with all our hearts.

Saint James says; "God is the Father of Light." Unlike the sun and the moon which wax and wane, God remains constant. Human laws and human ways change but God's laws and invitations to salvation never do. He has given us the marvellous gifts of the Gospel and Commandments, so we should not just listen to them but joyfully and deliberately live by them. In other words, Jesus is encouraging us to be doers of God's word and not hearers only.

In the Gospel, Jesus openly attacks the obsession of the Pharisees. He challenges their views about the Sabbath and ritual cleanliness. He emphasises the importance of one's attitude of the heart and personal commitment to God, rather than the external fulfilment of traditional precepts. Furthermore, when the scribes and Pharisees object Jesus setting aside their laws of human traditions, Jesus quotes from the book of Isaiah; "This people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me." This is a confirmation the inner attitude that counts before God. It's always good to be hygienic but what is more important is the change of heart. The Pharisees looks at the external but Jesus looks at the internal.

I hope you are not too alone in your isolation. I'm sure Angela has sent you some liturgy guidelines and activities from the Bishop's office which I know are very helpful for you and your family at this uncertain time. Please have a good look at them and make use of them. I have found them very useful, uplifting and encouraging. Mass is still televised on the Shine TV but our Churches will continue to be closed until our situation has improved. Enjoy your quiet days and remember the heart of our religion is not ritual and letters of the law but the love of God and neighbour. Please contact Kieran, Angela or myself if you need help. I'll keep you all in my prayers. Stay safe and be patient. Have a blessed Sunday and safe week ahead.

Blessings.

Simone Ah Lo sm.
