

## **Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

Churches are re-opening for private prayer, in many parishes there has been a return to daily Mass and, although the logistics involved are more complex and require greater planning and a larger team of volunteers, Mass is again being celebrated on Sunday. It is understandable that many people in all age groups are a little apprehensive and that some are waiting a little longer. After all, we have survived four months without Sunday Mass so why should a further week or two matter? All parish priests hope that Mass attendance post-Covid-19 will follow a rising curve, yet all know that the stricter their parish's safeguarding discipline and regulations and the more thorough their risk-assessment, the greater will be the confidence of the parish community in returning to a safe environment. The challenge to both pastor, stewards and members of the parish team that Covid-19 has brought into existence is that our parishioners return to an environment which is also welcoming.

One of the things which will put parishioners most at ease is the recognition that the essentials of the Mass have not changed since we went into lockdown. The Blessed Sacrament is still reserved and the sanctuary lamp continues to glow: we are reassured that the Lord is still in his house, he has not gone away! The second source of reassurance comes from the knowledge that the Word of God is still being proclaimed and that the word is being broken by the pastor in his homily. That word of the scriptures, shaped by the historical experiences and religious insights of an age very different to ours, is there to help us to understand and deal with the immediate challenges and problems of our own day. Pope John XXIII challenged the Church to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. As we struggle to make sense of the enormous changes in our personal lives and our lives as a family, to say nothing of the bewildering litany of changes of which the media appraise us every day, re-connecting with God's word and listening to it in the company of our brothers and sisters in the Lord, is something Christians will find extremely helpful and supportive.

Today's gospel focuses on that word. Jesus tells and goes on to explain the parable of the sower (it has always struck me as odd that Jesus should have to explain what is probably the most direct and obvious of his parables, but maybe he felt obliged to do so because he considered its message so vital). God has never given up on speaking to his people, he even engaged Adam and Eve in conversation in the Garden of Eden. The word was central to the ministry of Jesus and the gospels teach us how hungry the people of Galilee and Judea were to hear what he had to say. Let part of our return to church be a new openness to the message of the scriptures as they are read to us, let the light which they emit enlighten our minds and let the conviction with which they are proclaimed touch our hearts. Let our gradual return to church life not only prompt us to feed ourselves with the Eucharist but also make our own the message communicated by God's word so as to stiffen our resolve to bear witness to our faith in the new world which Covid-19 has brought to birth.

**Father Patrick**