

# St John the Evangelist, Poulton

2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

### Fifty-eighth Sunday of Isolation

Telephone: 01253 893184

Sign on at: [saintjohnpoulton@gmail.com](mailto:saintjohnpoulton@gmail.com)

Parish Website: [www.stjohnspoulton.org.uk](http://www.stjohnspoulton.org.uk)



*Every branch in me that bears no fruit  
he cuts away,  
and every branch that does bear fruit  
he prunes to make it bear even more.*

#### **Mass during the week:**

Saturday –	6.00pm	St John's
Tuesday -	9.30am	St John's
Wednesday -	9.30am	St Martin's
Thursday -	9.30am	St John's
Friday –	9.30am	St John's
Saturday –	6.00pm	St John's

(Daily Scripture is available from [www.universalis.com](http://www.universalis.com))

#### **Additional Passage before today's first reading**

*Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. <sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*

*<sup>23</sup> After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, <sup>24</sup> but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. <sup>25</sup> But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.....*

#### **Acts 9:19-25**

*When Saul got to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him: they could not believe he was really a disciple. Barnabas, however, took charge of him, introduced him to the apostles, and explained how the Lord had appeared to Saul and spoken to him on his journey, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Saul now started to go round with them in Jerusalem, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord. But after he had spoken to the Hellenists, and argued with them, they became determined to kill him. When the brothers knew, they took him to Caesarea, and sent him off from there to Tarsus.*

*The churches throughout Judaea, Galilee and Samaria were now left in peace, building themselves up, living in the fear of the Lord, and filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit.*

#### **Acts 9:26-31**

*Jesus said to his disciples:*

*'I am the true vine,  
and my Father is the vinedresser.  
Every branch in me that bears no fruit  
he cuts away,  
and every branch that does bear fruit  
he prunes to make it bear even more.  
You are pruned already,  
by means of the word that I have spoken to you.  
Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.  
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,  
but must remain part of the vine,  
neither can you unless you remain in me.  
I am the vine,  
you are the branches.  
Whoever remains in me, with me in him,  
bears fruit in plenty;  
for cut off from me you can do nothing.  
Anyone who does not remain in me  
is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers;  
these branches are collected and thrown on the fire,  
and they are burnt.  
If you remain in me  
and my words remain in you,  
you may ask what you will  
and you shall get it.  
It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit,  
and then you will be my disciples.'*

#### **John 15:1-8**

(What is God saying to you as you hear his Word here?)

**An addition to last week's messages about Paul: (Reading 1)**

(I have printed the section of Acts between Paul's conversion and today's reading above for added excitement)

*"When Saul got to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples,  
but they were all afraid of him: they could not believe he was really a disciple."*

Initial enthusiasm can sometimes lead us in difficult directions – especially if it comes without experience! Paul had always been both clever and enthusiastic but his weakness, it seems, was to recognise that he needs to speak to people about Jesus from where the listeners are! Firstly, in realising he was a full member of the disciples (He has met the risen Lord!) he misunderstands the fear and lack of knowledge of the others! It was in the hands of Barnabas, who is well respected by everyone, to introduce Paul and tell his story for him. Religious 'fervour' has always had the danger of putting more people off the message than gathering in, hasn't it? Christians don't just need 'truth' but also need to have gained the general respect of the hearer.

Paul's second 'rush of blood' is that he seems to have completely fallen out with the Greek speaking Jews (Hellenists) in Jerusalem. It is not clear what this is about, but we pick up in the New Testament writings that there is a general dispute between the Jerusalem (Local) Jews and the Hellenist (usually from outside Jerusalem) Jews – this 'locals' vs 'foreigners', 'Sandgrownuns' vs 'incomers' is common in communities, isn't it? However, after Paul is taken away by the disciples to 'cool down' or for further training may this confrontation have interested Paul enough for his to make the Hellenists his special ministry?

**Vines**

If we had to boil down God's message in Easter it surely is that he wishes to be in close relationship with his people. This is not a new message but the Easter events open up God's need for a much deeper and better shared relationship. We return to the teaching of Jesus to find suggestions of this closeness.

In all the scriptures and until our present day we should also notice that humanity is very frightened of the closeness to God. Moses had his own difficulties on the mountain, but at various stages of the history of salvation humanity has hidden from God's offer to be close – even our church buildings can be a way of isolating our communication with God away from other aspects of our daily life. (Go to Mass and then criticise people on the way home?)

Jesus' pictures of the closeness of his Father to his individual people can seem uncomfortable to us – to be a friend of Jesus is attractive, but how would you feel about him living in your spare room? If you have found marriage difficult at times keep an eye on how close the Father wishes to be to us!

*"I am the vine,  
you are the branches."*

If you have kept vines or similar climbing things you will know how parts of the plant are connected to others and that, if you sever the stem the whole plant will bleed to death. Well, that's today's parable – simple but terrifying if we do not trust the Father.

A quick story I have probably told before but makes the point: *My brother was trained in Horticulture and worked for a time with a friend from college doing gardens in a posh part of London. After completing a garden job he knocked on the back door of the house to ask the lady for her money! As he spoke and waved his hand across the lovely work he and Rod had done he noticed that the ornamental ivy coating the garage wall did not, now, connect to the stem entering the ground (The story goes that this was Rod's part of the job!). Quickly thinking he explained to the lady the damage ivy can do to walls and suggested that she removed it before it did more damage – and they were prepared to do it now at not extra cost! (You can finish the story yourself!)*

If we are part of this vine it is understandable that the unproductive branches should be removed and burned. But it is ever so slightly worrying that the productive branches need pruning so that they can produce more! I can only imagine that pruning, even for the best of outcomes, is always painful?

How close does God want to be to me? How do I feel about that?

What is God asking of us today (Not yesterday)? What will it cost me?

SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2021

*"My thoughts turn to the elderly, to young people, to the sick and to newlyweds. During this Easter Season, which invites us to meditate on the mystery of Christ's Resurrection, may the glory of the Lord be for each of us a wellspring of new energy in the journey towards salvation. I offer my blessing to you all!"*

Pope Francis

GENERAL AUDIENCE APRIL 21, 2021

## **PARISH NOTICES:**

### **COVID 19 Security - When you come to Mass:**

***Now that we have been allowed to move from private prayer to being able to celebrate Mass together please remember to do so safely. We have been asked to ensure Government and Church rules which might seem intrusive but they are designed to remind us to be careful and, above all, to keep distances. Please help us with this by being careful.***

- ✓ Government guidelines demand that all the congregation (except those with exemption certificates) wear mouth and nose masks in church
- ✓ Please maintain a 2m distance as you approach and enter church and be guided by the stewards.
- ✓ Please note there is a 'one way' system – entering church by the left hand door.
- ✓ Please sanitise your hands as you enter church
- ✓ You will be invited to leave your name and contact detail for 'Track & Tracing' in case of need.
- ✓ If you wish to wear a face mask you may do this – but please bring your own.
- ✓ To minimise movement in church Stewards will direct you to fill the benches from the front. You will probably not be able to go in your 'usual' bench but that will give you a new perspective!
- ✓ Please remove your mask just before approaching for Holy Communion and then replace afterwards.
- ✓ You will receive instructions for coming forward for Holy Communion. But please respect distancing (don't bunch), move for Communion using the one-way system, please stretch out your arms fully as you request Holy Communion, you will not be invited to speak "Amen" before receiving Holy Communion. These will need to be kept in mind at first and we do need to remember they, though not the best liturgy, are about distancing and staying well.
- ✓ Holy Communion must be received only on the hand. (No gloves, please)
- ✓ Please sanitise your hands as you leave church by the other door than the one you entered.
- ✓ As you leave church please move away from the door and remember to distance yourselves if you speak to other people.
- ✓ There is a basket at the back of church for your offertory donations – thank you.
- ✓ There are weekly bulletins at the back of church with other information.
- ✓ Please do greet other people outside church – but remember to distance yourself and do not meet in groups that are obviously more than six.

Thanks to our small, but keen, band of stewards, without whom we could not open our church. Please speak to them if you would like to help with this.

- **Know any parishioners housebound or who may need contacting?** - At the start of this lockdown a number of parishioners offered to find a way of being help to those parishioners who are in need or just housebound. Many people are in contact with the parish through this email or the WhatsApp group, but you may think of some who are not getting parish contacts – but they may get family support and food. If you have suggestions please email their names and addresses to the parish address and we can get parishioners to drop a message in to them. Thanks.
- **Fleetwood Food Bank:** If you know of anyone you think has need of a parcel of food from the Food Bank please telephone 01253 774313 – they will need an address to have it delivered to.
- **Local COVID19 Helplines** *(Official message from our Parish Organisers)*  
The Wyre Council have a dedicated helpline for COVID19 isolation support. If you are struggling to get essential items, or need help, please ring 01253 891000 and select OPTION 7 when prompted. Alternatively, if you have access to the internet, you can fill in the online request for help here: [www.wyre.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.wyre.gov.uk/coronavirus). There is also another local network being organised by the Methodist Church - called POULTONCAN. The helpline there is 01253 670800 between 8am and 10pm, 7 days a week.

We have a group of parish volunteers who are going to be working with the council to respond to requests. If anyone would like to offer help, please email Jenny at [jennifer.hillman.sutcliffe@gmail.com](mailto:jennifer.hillman.sutcliffe@gmail.com) or telephone on 07568502749.

- **Parish WhatsApp Group:** Emily Halliwell (as part of the above group) has set up a closed parish WhatsApp account. I have finally been beaten into joining but am a bit of a WhatsApp virgin as yet! Emily says: "My number is 07969643648 if you want to be added just reply with your mobile number or text me. "

### **Thoughts contributed by Virus Times readers:**

(A few responses from these Virus Times Reflections from our parishioners: Thanks to contributors.)

**Saturday:** Thank you. We can bank on "Virus Times" - I'm not sure that we can bank on all being revealed in "Line of Duty" tomorrow.  
xx

**Wednesday:** Read recently: "An American preacher, Eugene Walsh, once finished off his sermon with the remarkable words, "Jesus only promised two things: Your life has meaning and you're going to live forever. If you get a better offer, take it!"

**Sunday:** So much to ponder! We refer to family as "our own flesh and blood" and so they are. They have our genes, we have given them life, we have shared our lives with them and we hope our values. You may also remember the TV programme entitled "You are what you eat".

St Augustine commenting on John Ch. 6 writes: "***If you receive the Eucharist well, you are what you eat. Since you are the Body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery which you receive. As you come to communion, you hear the words 'The Body of Christ' and you answer 'Amen'. Be, therefore, members of Christ that your 'Amen' may be true. Be what you see. Receive what you already are.***"

For the first thousand years of the Church, the baptised were called the True Body and the consecrated bread and wine was called the Mystical Body. How did this become flipped? As you write: The 'off top of the head' answer goes nowhere near the whole answer.

**Saturday:** **Understanding the signs: Food for thought:**

I had a friend who used to do a lot of serious thinking. In speaking of him I would say that "he chews things over." We also speak of someone "munching" an apple meaning that the person eats steadily and often audibly. When Jesus is responding to the question: "How can this fellow give us his flesh to eat?" John, writing in Greek, uses a very physical word which is best translated as "munch" or "chew". And so, in this accurate translation, Jesus' words are: "The one who chews (munches) my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life".

When we share in the Eucharist and "eat this bread and drink this cup" we are indicating our readiness to ponder deeply ("chew on") the meaning and significance of this act of communion which makes us one, not only with the one we claim as Lord, but also one with each other, his true body called to his mission: "My food, he said, is to do the will of the one who sent me".

Is our food to be anything less?

### **People being prayed for by our parish groups:**

Len Rawcliffe RIP	Len's Requiem Mass will be at St John's on 14 <sup>th</sup> May. <i>COVID restriction: For an invitation please speak to the family.</i>
Maroulla RIP	Maroulla's family thanks you for your prayer. The Requiem Mass will be at St Martin's Chapel on Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> May at 2.30pm <i>(admittance by invitation of the family)</i>
Peter Brownwood	Who is worried about his health – but progressing well.
From Jayne Clark	Could I please ask that our parishioners pray for all the staff in children's social care who are still working to safeguard children in our area and around the country. It never ceases to amaze me how hard they work generally, despite the abuse that they often are subjected to, but more so currently given the extra risk that they are putting themselves under to visit the vulnerable.

**'Thank You, God'** - Do we have any news to thank God for - as well as other people we are praying for?

<b>Our School Staff</b>	
<b>Clare and Pete Cobb's glorious music</b>	<i>they have sung us through Covid; it's been a joy – and still is!</i>
<b>For all our Faith-filled Parishioners with whom we share our weekday Masses.</b>	<i>It's so supportive to be in the presence of others.</i>
<b>To scientists working on a COVID help</b>	<i>Well done for breakthroughs</i>