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Parish: Our Lady of Compassion

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Dear friends of Our Lady of Compassion Formby

‘The Lord is near...’

I have been waiting patiently for the weather to improve to catch a glimpse of an extraordinary event in the skies. The planets Jupiter and Saturn are moving to their closest point for hundreds of years. In fact, the last time this phenomenon was clearly visible was 800 years ago! The closest point will be reached on Monday night, just after sunset, low down in the sky to the south west of us.

People are unsurprisingly talking about another conjunction of planets two thousand years ago. There was apparently a conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in 2 BC which was possibly the Star of Bethlehem. In any event, the phenomenon taking place in the skies above us this week is very rare, a once in a lifetime event, and I hope we might be able to catch a glimpse of it.

We would all agree that the year which is passing has been very difficult for us all. We will surely be glad to see the back of it! And yet... the pandemic has been reminding us of some important truths. Among them, we might say; the fragility and preciousness of life, the need to reach out, the care of the most vulnerable, a greater awareness of the environment, gratitude for the smallest gifts.

But isn't it true that we have learned to appreciate nature more deeply? Especially in this part of the world where we live. Despite the trials of the human family, the seasons change and nature continues on its course. The sun rises and sets and the stars continue to move in the skies. We are more aware of our smallness than ever. We can readily see God in His handiwork around us. We can perhaps pray more easily as we walk and take in this beauty. But is His beauty to be found a little nearer to home?

As Catholics, we have been formed to focus on the church as our place of prayer, community and worship. Our church life has been disrupted, making us feel that we have been cut adrift, orphaned. Those who have been shielding for many months, or are having to shield and isolate this winter, feel this particularly acutely. What do we do when we cannot get to church, attend Mass, receive the Eucharist?

I think that we have been discovering a deep Christian truth which was lived everywhere in the early years of the church's history; the church of the home, the domestic church. I am convinced that this is one of the greatest gifts that God is offering us in these days. The church of the home is not an optional extra, not a recent idea or concept. It is baked into the very heart of our faith.



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18 School Lane, Formby, L37 3LW

Served by the Churches of Our Lady of Compassion and St. Jerome

Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Trustees In. Reg. Charity No: 232709



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Someone recently wrote that the parish church is a 'church of churches'. That is, a gathering place for all the domestic churches which make up the community.

Let's think about this for a moment. All of us are formed, nurtured and taught in our homes. The home, the family is absolutely crucial for society. The shape of family life has certainly changed in recent times, but it is love, acceptance and stability that makes a family. And it is here, in the family, that God first appears, reveals Himself. And let us be clear; God is as present in the mess, the sufferings and the challenges of family life, as He is present in the joys and good times. That God accepts us and loves us is something we should learn first at home.

The most crucial church, the most formative church and the most needed church is the family. It is there that we learn that God is present at every moment, in every place. That He waits for us in so many people and situations. The parish church is the place where we go to be fed and nourished by God's word and the Eucharist, and to be supported and encouraged by our brothers and sisters. But it is the home, the family which is the first focus of our faith, and our prayer.

'The Lord is near..' This is what the Advent prayers and readings are telling us. Can we see Him? Do we sense His presence? Where are we looking? Let us look firstly to our homes, to our families. When the pandemic takes away regular access to our parish church, let us find the Lord at home in our domestic church. Even for those of us who live alone, the Lord is no less present. In the lonely moments, the sleepless nights and the long silences, He whispers to us to open our eye and ears to realise that we are not alone. He is there.

To all our families then, to parents who are making great sacrifices for their children, having to work long hours and struggle with many anxieties, the Lord has made His home with you and will never leave you. He is present in your love, your sacrifices and sufferings. Through these the Lord will give many blessings to you and to your children. He wants you to feel at home with Him, in your little church, your home. If you want to find Him, call out to Him, ask for help and comfort, look no further than your own family, your own home.

To all who are living alone or are shielding and isolating. The days can be long and tedious. We miss our friends and companions, our social events and our days away. Our homes can become oppressive. The Lord is there. A small candle, a bible, even a collection of photos or letters to look back at past blessings. All these speak of God who remains with us and never leaves us. He reassured us that the darkness will pass, light will come and we will experience the joys of friendship again. The place where we live is our home. But it is also our church. God wants to feed and encourage us there as well.



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Only a few days remain before the Christmas Feast. Let us use them well. Let us build up and cherish the church of the home, the church of the family. In this way, our parish church will become even more a house of prayer, of encouragement and joy. Above all, our hearts will open wider to receive the One who is coming this Christmas to seek a home with all those who wait for Him and desire to love Him.

May God bless you and your loved ones.

Father John



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