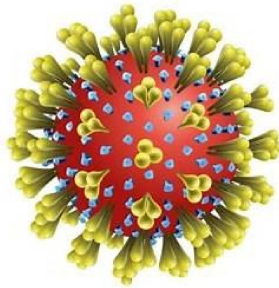


Abbeyside, Ballinroad & Garranbane Parish

Hello! What else can I say? It is Thursday 2nd April just after noon. The Sun is shining, the whir of weeds being strimmed next door, calm azure full tide bay filling half my permitted exercise area! I was nearly tempted to begin "Do not be afraid, it is I." But that would be far too cheeky, and sacrilegious. The word afraid is not inappropriate though. Some have made their wills in recent weeks. I'm not afraid, perhaps foolishly, for myself. However, I do fear for my mother and uncle to name just two. Strange and unsettling times. Tomorrow was to have been Confirmation. Last Wednesday was to have seen the re-opening of Abbeyside Church. Last Saturday's wedding and baptism were torpedoed by shutdown the previous midnight. This time three weeks ago teachers and school children were told to go home.

How are you coping? If you are over 70: are you adjusting to staying inside? Relying on others. What a change. For me, like everyone else, it is an extraordinary 'flipping over'. I had been *ag rith is ag rás* from morning till night. Then, full stop. I ran out of oil and so had to rely on sticks for the stove for the first week! No harm: it anchored me to the one warm room. Time to rest, to ponder. Then I busied myself trying to get Abbeyside church finished, first for the wedding, then to be able to celebrate Mass and share it with you via the webcam. Alas the electrical wheels turned too slowly, and lockdown came first. Full stop, again. Many of you have raw hands from washing, scrubbing, tidying, painting, dumping, fixing, planting, pruning. One 94-year-old turned his slightly shaky hand to writing a book about what it was like to grow up over a shop, as a means of coping with his cocooning!

What a beautiful image of a sphere with symmetrical protruding 'plants', but with such devastating consequences when Covid-19 attaches to our lungs. The invisible killer, passport immune, has free travel, the world its oyster.



Still I see buds and blossoms, dandelions and daffodils, daisies and primroses. The natural world is blooming. Not humanity, though; turmoil. World leaders vary in their abilities to face the crisis. Ours are doing well. Timely to have a medic as Taoiseach.

As I walked out for my essential exercise, a cyclist with his back to me suddenly stopped on the narrow Strandside footpath, blocking my way. Turning to face me: 'What is going to happen to Confirmation?' Hesitating, reversing to regain the social distance, I spluttered: 'I don't know.' 'And what about her Communion?' as he nodded to his daughter. Again: 'I don't know. Bishop Cullinan wrote to schools the day they closed saying Parish Priests would celebrate Confirmation on 31st May, Pentecost. But now nobody knows.' 'We got a laptop for them to do their schoolwork. We printed out loads of stuff for the next few weeks. She even did a cross for Sunday.' 'Oh, Palm Sunday' I blurted out. Distance learning has been taken to a new level, with parents home schooling and múinteoirí home teaching. Zoom the in thing.

Neighbours and nearby relations pick up and drop off messages. Phone calls are a life line, particularly for those living alone. **An Post** are going more than the extra mile, picking up shopping lists and medicine needs, checking in, bringing the paper, and graciously delivering these greetings. Such community spirit. All for one, one for all. **An Garda** are also going way above and beyond to protect and care for all.

St Vincent de Paul (087 9789974) are doing sterling work helping those most in need. The **G.A.A., Ballinroad Community Group** and **Surprise Surprise**, are registered with covidsupport@waterfordcouncil.ie helpline **1800 250185** to help deliver groceries, medicine and fuels. The **Parish Visitation** team are happy to ring people who would like a chat. If interested, please call **087 6737220**. Bob from Ballinacourty is providing whatsapp quizzes to keep boredom at bay. All manner of thoughtful messages and videos are being texted and shared to help put perspective on this medical melt down and its implications.

Dare I mention **Easter**? At a popular or surface level, it seems churlish to refer to liturgical events in the midst of medical chaos and widespread fear of immanent death, with the numbers of daily Covid-19 fatalities and diagnoses on everyone's lips. Now more than ever, Easter is no mere festival or holiday. While churches are locked and empty, save for lone priests celebrating on behalf of the people the last earthly days of Jesus and the events of his suffering, death and resurrection, Easter is the essence of who and what we are, especially in these frightening and forboding days.

Eggs and bunnies are not Easter, but enjoyable and entertaining add ons. **Easter is easing our way deep into the essence of who we are: fragile, frail and fearful.** Regardless of how important we felt we were, many of us have had to drop everything. Life goes on without us. When we thought we were indispensable, we were dispensed with. Advised to apply for Covid-19 pandemic unemployment benefit. Who am I now, when I'm not doing this or that, for him or her or them? Annie Dilliard said we are here to witness. To let go. To just be. To stay at home. To observe. To be at home in our own skin. Some see the silver lining and cherish the time for families to be together. To have time to read and pray.

WEBCAM/LIVESTREAMING BACK IN ACTION IN ABBEYSIDE! GOOGLE abgparish.ie

Holy Thursday 7.00pm

Good Friday 12.00pm Stations of Cross

Holy Saturday 7.00pm Vigil

3.00pm The Passion

Easter Sunday

12PM Mass

Daily Mass

10am Monday to Friday

For community to be strengthened as the strong help those at risk. Rat race suspended. People not profit put first. Health not wealth. As a dying Steve Jobs wryly observed: 'the most expensive bed in the world is a hospital bed.'

We are dying, I hope, to a feverish way and frenetic pace of life. We're grieving in this in-between time. We miss what we've become used to. We don't know what is ahead...possible death or bereavement, and certainly economic repercussions. Jobs saw all his worldly achievements, wealth and fame crumble into insignificance when his life ebbed away. Love, art and dreams suddenly loomed large.

I met a nonagenarian yesterday who knows she is dying. 'You have to be prepared Father. I'm prepared.' And in the next breath: 'Isn't it terrible all those poor people dying...23 today. I pray for them.' Such awareness. Acceptance. And not consumed by her own condition, but with a capacity to empathise with others. Trusting in life and love. Family love. God's love. Easter.

Parishioners in Bergamo bought their 72 year old priest a ventilator because he had a bad chest. Knowing the pandemic had brought the medical services to breaking point, he gave the ventilator to a younger man. He gave his life to save a life. Easter.

Closer to home an 89 year old dying of the virus, dictated to the nurse a last letter to his family unable to visit: 'What a way to go, calm and peaceful.' Easter.

Front-line medical workers, a quarter of confirmed covid cases, putting their own health at risk to save us all. Easter. Self sacrifice. Accepting the ebb and flow of life and love, health and wealth.

Yesterday I read a moving meditation on the divine embrace by US theologian Bernard Cooke, pertinent perhaps at a time when physical proximity let alone human touch is not possible. I'll try to capture Cooke's insight: To embrace another, while physical touch, holding and closeness are obvious, our attitude of being open, equal and free is key. Such an attitude underpins any genuine and good embrace, and surely mirrors God's utterly open, respectful and unforced embrace. Whether we're believers or not, I think and trust that we're part of something and someone bigger and beyond, intimately immersed and engaged but not coercing or forcing our freedom.

When his disillusioned and distraught friends and followers encountered Jesus, after dying and rising, he reassured them: 'Do not be afraid, it is I'. 'Peace' he said to others. To the doubter, 'look at my wounds'. As we 'huddle together' in heart and mind, while spatially standing apart, we continue to help each other in every way possible and necessary. We also join in prayer: we will, wish and want all to be well; we trust in human precautions and medical interventions; if and when we find ourselves in the ultimate worst case scenario, we ask for the strength to surrender our spirit in the supreme sacrifice, taking a leap into the unknown...trusting, hoping, praying that out of death, darkness and despair will come Easter life, light and love without limit.

Easter well!

Ned Hassett

PS Just as these greetings are going to print, I'm assured that our webcam will be back by Holy Thursday!

Ballinroad Sacristans: Changing of the Guard I take this opportunity to thank our two sacristans TONY BUTLER and TOMMY FROST for their dedicated and unstinting service over the past five and a quarter years. Ever approachable and available they both served Ballinroad well. Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus, they have slipped quietly away. Míle buíochas daoibh beirt. We also warmly welcome our new sacristan ANN CROWTHER. Ann has pedigree, following in her mother's footsteps! We wish you well Ann, as you fill not one but two pairs of shoes!

Abbeyside Ballinroad Garranbane

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