

Holy Week approaches and we are still social distancing, or *cocooning*. Continued gratitude to all keeping the restrictions and, ultimately, keeping us all safer. Thanks to all on the frontline of caring, those working and supplying our shops, those keeping us safe and, a group I haven't mentioned before, our farmers, working hard in difficult circumstances. Also, special mention to people dealing with illness themselves, or with a loved one, in these strange times; particularly, those dealing with loss and bereavement. Please have a special place for them in your thoughts and prayers, and we will console them in person when this is over.

I continue to offer Mass for your intentions, along with the Mass on RTE News Now each weekday at 10.30am. I intend to do the same with the Easter Ceremonies on RTE. The times are located elsewhere on the website. Please join with me, and pray for ourselves and our parish at this unique Holy Week and Easter. The ceremonies on RTE are coming from Mullingar this year and give us a unique opportunity to be united in prayer with Bishop Deenihan. I continue, also, to observe an hour of prayer each evening from 7 to 8pm. Please join me for some part of this time at home.

We are not providing *palm* at the churches, on the advice that it might carry the virus. Other places, I see, are suggesting that people cut a branch from their own garden and place it in a window or porch as a sign of solidarity. Sunday 3-4pm is suggested, by all the Christian leaders in Ireland, as a time of united prayer for an improvement in the situation, and for all affected.

By now, some people have created a sacred space at home. Again, people in other parishes suggest: getting a bowl and towel for Holy Thursday, as a reminder of Jesus washing the apostles' feet; Good Friday, a crucifix to remember Jesus' suffering and death; Holy Saturday night, lighting a candle, safely, to remember the resurrection; Easter Sunday, using some holy water to remember our baptism.

We might never have done anything like this before, and have just turned up for the ceremonies. This is an opportunity to be more involved and creative, for ourselves and our families. This is a Lent and Easter like no other. Please embrace it and appreciate what we have. The current turmoil gives us an idea of the tension, uncertainty and fear, of that first Holy Week and Easter.

A word about the churches. They remain open, though a concern is about the many surfaces that Covid-19 can survive on. I plan to cordon off some areas in each of the churches and regularly clean the remaining areas. There are disinfectant wipes at the doors, along with the hand gel, if you have any extra concerns. Leaflets for the Easter ceremonies are available from the churches and elsewhere on this website.

About Confessions: Pope Francis reiterated recently that, at a time like this, when confession is not possible in the usual way, saying a good act of contrition, and resolving to go to confession as soon as possible, will suffice for now.

This is a unique time for reflection. Thanks to all making decisions and taking action to keep us safe. It may be getting harder to keep to the restrictions as time goes on , but please offer your sacrifices up with Christ and our brothers and sisters across the world. This Holy Week and Easter could be the most transformative one, for ourselves and others, since the first one so many years ago. Each one of us is unique and has a unique contribution to make.

Help and advice available from:

Alone Covid-19 Support line everyday, 8am to 8pm, at 0818 222024

Third Age Ireland 1800 404591

Meath Co Co Support line every day, 9am to 7pm, at 1800 808809

Rathkenny GAA. Contact Ross at 087 1527023

Fr Gerry