



Diocesan Centre
Coursington Road
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Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS
Bishop of Motherwell

20th November 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I hope this finds you and all your families well. To those not so well, or recently bereaved, I offer the prayerful support of our Diocesan community.

As we move into the three-week period of Tier 4 restrictions this evening, I offer a word of encouragement as we strive to do our best to observe what is asked of us and to uphold the common good of our fellow citizens.

With the grim death toll from the Covid-19 virus in Scotland now in excess of 5000, it is most important that we are mindful of the need to limit the number of deaths, which have risen again in recent weeks, and to support the steps taken to suppress the virus again and so protect human life.

I would hope that if I became seriously ill at this time because of the virus or any other ailment, I could be admitted to hospital and be treated as well as possible by our wonderful NHS staff. It is clearly necessary that beds are available in our local hospitals and that an adequate number of staff are on duty to make this possible. The same applies to everyone of us, and we expect that the necessary steps be taken to make sure those of us you take ill this winter can be treated in the way we expect. When the government says, therefore, that we need a period of heavier restrictions to protect our hospitals and those who work in them, we should accept this in good faith.

The period of Tier 4 restrictions has resulted in a reduction in the numbers allowed to attend public worship in all faith traditions, from a maximum of 50 to that of 20. We shouldn't see this as implying that there was some lack of safety in having 50 people at Mass, because clearly there hasn't been, but rather a sharing in the restrictions placed upon all gatherings in communal settings, except schools, in the expectation that this will help drive down the spread of the virus. There is no place for complaining that we are being unfairly treated, or that exceptions should be made for particular groups. We are being asked to share in the present deprivation in the hope that conditions can improve for everyone with restrictions being eased when it is safe to happen. I add also that the new restrictions placed on the numbers attending public worship in Scotland are less severe than those in the other jurisdictions in the UK and Ireland, and further afield. Our government has accepted the need for public worship to continue, while other services have been completely closed. The importance of religious faith and practice in our society is acknowledged, although the additional restrictions will reduce our normal Mass attendance.

During these coming three weeks, the Church's present Liturgical Year will end and the new one begin with the Season of Advent. The time of patient waiting for the Lord's coming will be very real for us this Advent as we look forward to Christmas and to a return to Mass and the full celebration of our Catholic faith. The people of old waited a long time for the coming of the Messiah, and endured many trials and disappointments as they did so, but those who had persevered in hope were ready when the Saviour was born.

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In our present need, we long for the light of Christ to shine among us and lift us from our present gloom. Whether in the safety of our homes or in the quiet of our churches, let us reach out to the Lord in faith and trust – *“Come, Lord Jesus, come!”*

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Joseph Toal". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

+ Joseph Toal