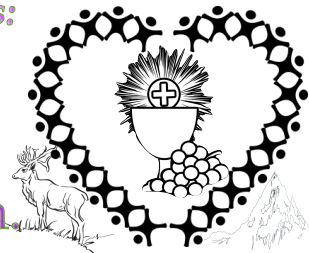


Our Current Weekend Mass Schedule for the Elk Valley is:

*Fernie on Saturday evening at 5pm,
Sparwood at 9am Sunday morning,
and Elkford at 4pm Sunday afternoon.*



The Sunday Mass is broadcast via Zoom from Fernie & Sparwood (see below).

19th/20th March 2022

Dear All,

I am writing this on Wednesday – so relatively early in the week. And this week wherever I have been the issue of Ukraine seems to be on everyone's minds - and in their hearts.

Prayers for Ukraine – *I Vow to Thee, My Country*

Last Sunday morning at our Sparwood Mass our singer, Greg, sang a song to a tune by Gustav Holst (an English composer from the beginning of the last century). The tune was 'Thaxted' which was part of the Jupiter movement from his 1917 composition 'The Planets'. This same tune was used for one of the most famous Remembrance Day songs in Britain, "I Vow to Thee, My Country". This song was played at Prince Philip's funeral last year, as well as at the funerals of Winston Churchill, Princes Diana, Margaret Thatcher, and for those in the Elk Valley who remember her, at Margaret Bella's funeral in Fernie. It is regularly sung at many remembrance services across Britain.



Now why do I mention all this? Well in preparation for last Sunday's Mass, and thinking about the dreadful things happening in Ukraine, I went back and looked up the words to this hymn and I was moved to tears.

The hymn is based on the second and third verses of a poem written by Sir Cecil Spring Rice before the First World War. With a number of biblical references this poem describes the feelings of someone who has moved away from their homeland and then hears of a war that is taking place there and that many civilians are dying in the streets. The first verse of the poem (that is omitted from the hymn) talks of how the writer makes haste back to "my mother, a son among thy sons".

The poem then transitions into a more general calling to loyalty, but not to a particular country, rather to Christ and to heaven (referred to in the feminine). The second verse of the poem (first verse of the hymn) talks about the love that is laid upon the altar, "the love that pays the price" by making "the final sacrifice". While referring to the book of Genesis and the offering of Isaac on the altar, ultimately this points to a description of Christ's love for us, and a love that we are asked to imitate at the service of others, a love shown in a particularly vivid way when people lay down their lives in service of their country and their fellow citizens.

The last verse of the poem then talks, not about an earthly kingdom, but the Kingdom of Heaven saying that “soul by soul” the numbers in heaven increase, and it ends by quoting Proverbs 3:17, “And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace”

This is obviously a patriotic song written in a time of war to encourage people to be faithful, and perhaps even to sign up for military service. And it obviously is a very moving hymn. But it was the first verse that got to me and got the tears flowing; the author describing their homeland in the feminine writes:

*I heard my country calling, away across the sea,
Across the waste of waters, she calls and calls to me.
Her sword is girded at her side, her helmet on her head,
And around her feet are lying the dying and the dead;
I hear the noise of battle, the thunder of her guns;
I haste to thee, my mother, a son among thy sons.*

I don't want to be too jingoistic or even falsely sentimental, but how can we forget President John F. Kennedy's famous words uttered in 1963 in West Berlin, Germany, “*Ich bin ein Berliner*” – I am a Berliner – and not in some way think, “And I am a Ukrainian”! If we associate ourselves with the suffering of Ukraine at this most dreadful time, how can we not be moved to tears as we see on every news programme that, “around her feet are lying the dying and the dead”?

Emotionalism for the sake of emotionalism has no value, but in this case I wonder if the danger just at the moment is that somehow what we see on our screens will become ‘normalised’ and we will look at the events in Ukraine from the outside. As I tried to say last week, we must pray from our hearts, so that as we pray our hearts are also changed to the ways of the Holy Spirit, because “her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace”.

As you can probably pick up by this slightly incoherent rambling, I am still struggling to process all that is going on and I do pray so much for an end to the suffering and the deaths.

(I have included the complete words to the hymn at the end of this e-mail, plus a link to a particularly beautiful version of the hymn by the British choir school, Libera.)

A Sunflower – symbol of Ukrainian resistance – with the backdrop of the Ukrainian flag, and a heart.



New Covid Restrictions

As you no doubt have heard, the Covid restrictions in British Columbia have mostly been lifted and we can start doing a few more things in the parish and at Mass.

Now the first thing to say is that between 11:59pm last Thursday when the restrictions were *still in place*, and 12:01am last Friday when the restrictions *weren't in force*, in terms of the Covid virus, nothing changed! All that changed was the rules that the Province had laid down. And as we transition back to something more like what we were doing before, I think it is so important to remember that the virus is still there and, for some, it is a real threat to their wellbeing. If someone has vulnerabilities, or problems with their immune system, the Covid virus really does need to be avoided at all costs. So please don't say, "We are now allowed to hug people and shake hands, and go close to others" and do all these things unless you know that the other person is genuinely comfortable with you getting close to them.

To give one small example. On Friday – the day the restrictions were lifted – at about 7pm I went into a local supermarket and quickly realised that I was the only person in there who was wearing a mask. As such I clearly felt a lot of pressure on me not to be the one who was 'different' or the 'stick in the mud' who was still wearing their mask, so I took my mask off! I was slightly amazed at myself because I hadn't made this decision based upon an assessment of risk but rather upon very, very gentle social pressure!!! The next time I went into a supermarket I purposely put my mask on, not because I thought I needed it, but so that if anyone else was feeling like the odd-one-out wearing a mask they knew they had an ally!

So when you come to church, if you want to wear a mask please do – even if you are the only person wearing a mask, that is fine. To this end, I will be wearing one as I stand at the door and when I give out Communion. This is not because I think I will catch Covid, but because I know that I do get relatively close to a lot of our older parishioners and those with vulnerabilities, and I would hate to get Covid, be asymptomatic and then pass it on to someone who was vulnerable.

New Guidelines for Mass

Firstly, and most importantly, the one provision that has not changes is that if you are feeling unwell, please don't come to church. This applies as much to a common cold as to Covid or any other possibly infectious disease!

Apart from that, the new guidelines are:

- There will be no signing-in needed when you come to Mass.
- But when you do come in and take a seat in church, please be mindful of those around you; some people might still want to keep a certain distance from others, and we very much want our church to be a welcoming place where anyone can come and feel safe, so please be aware that others might still need a bit of physical distancing around them in the pews.

- There is now no limit to our capacity at Mass – as the Bishop said, “It will be a blessing to see our churches full again”!!! I must say, if we filled out churches it would not just be a blessing but perhaps better described as a miracle!
- There is no need to wear your mask in church, but please do be conscious of the needs of others and act first and foremost in a way that protects others.
- We can now start taking a collection once more.
- We can also have an offertory procession when the gifts of bread and wine are brought forward.
- We can process out at the end of Mass.
- I will again be at the door after Mass to greet people as they leave. (See below.)

Other changes to the use of the other parish facilities will come in April.

Greeting at the Door

I won't be at the door before Mass as that is usually a busy time for operating the Zoom broadcast and getting things lined up and ready for the broadcast.

I will be at the door at the end of Mass, but I will try – weather permitting – to stand a little away from the door so we don't get bunching.

But being at the door at the end of Mass means that our Zoom broadcasts might end a bit more abruptly than normal! Sorry about this; we will work to see how we can smooth this out a bit. Also, it means that there might be a slightly delay before I can get to the Communion after Mass.



Zoom Broadcasts and Communion After Mass

I very much hope and intend to keep the Zoom broadcasts going, but ultimately this will be a decision for the Parish Councils. Early signs are that Sparwood has said that they very much want the 9am Sunday morning Mass to continue to be broadcast, and at the next Parish Council meeting in Fernie we will keep this under review.

Certainly my thought is that we still have a good number who can't get to Mass because of health issues related to Covid. But perhaps more importantly, we have discovered that there are very many others who either can't get to Mass at all and now feel connected to their parish in a way they have not been able to before, and there are those who from time to time have to miss a Sunday in the parish but at least can watch remotely so don't lose the pattern of the scripture readings or the sermons – which I do try to link from week to week.

And if there is a Zoom broadcast then we can also continue to offer Communion after Mass to those who turn up in their vehicles.

Lent – Sacrament of Reconciliation

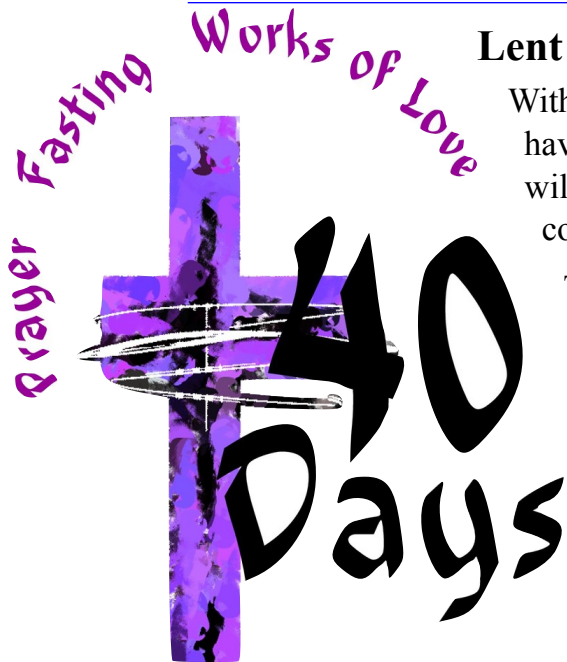
With the opening up of activities we are again allowed to have Reconciliation Services, that is, a service where we will have a visiting priest(s) to join me in hearing confessions.

This Lent we will be having just one service for the whole valley, and it will be in Sparwood on Monday 28th March at 6pm. So in larger print, that looks like:

6pm on
Monday 28th March
in Sparwood.

We will be joined by Fr. Jim from Kimberley and there might be another priest joining us as well, but this hasn't yet been confirmed.

With the distances in the East Kootenay, and with the weather still questionable, it is really difficult to get priests to travel for these services. To be with us Fr. Jim will have to do a three-and-a-half hour round trip. Even Cranbrook is a three hour round trip, and Creston or Invermere – the next closest priests – are getting closer to a six hour drive. So I hope that parishioners will be understanding and try to make the short half-hour hop from Fernie or Elkford to the central point in Sparwood for this reconciliation service.



Lenten Talk Series

The full details of our Lent talks are presented at the end of this e-mail. This e-mail is being written before this week's talk, so really I have no update beyond what I wrote last week.

Lenten Observance

I was talking to someone in Fernie today and we were discussing how Lent is going. I must say that for me it is quite challenging – but I think in a constructive way. I am trying not to fill every minute of my day with busyness, but rather when I see an opportunity I try to make a bit of space to let God in – a mini 'Sabbath'. This might be while walking the dog, while driving or whenever. And, of course, making a space means that all sorts of things rush in to fill that space and I have to really battle to keep them out.

The other things I have tried to do is 'unplug' a bit from the phone, e-mails and the internet, but of course, what happens when I do that? I miss a call from the funeral home – or at least, I am very late in responding.

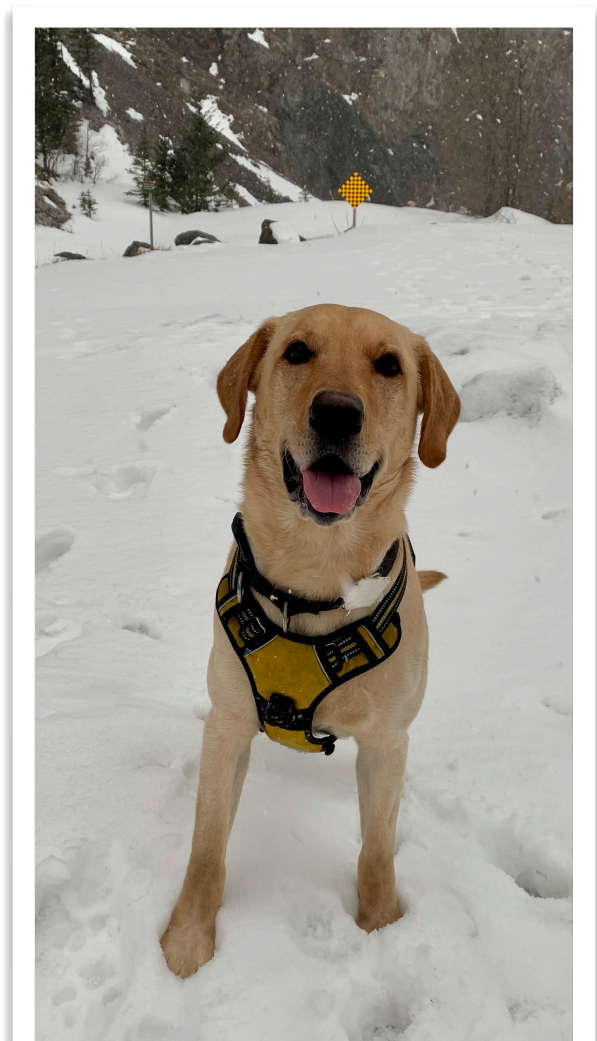
As I mentioned last week, the pause before Communion is one of the things from which I am getting the most spiritual joy. I tell you, I would happily stop for five minutes at that point and be with my prayers, but I do feel very self-conscious and I am frightened people will think, "What's he doing? Why has he stopped?" And as I want to make Mass a good experience for everyone, I try not to stop for too long! But certainly at this point I am managing to push out the busyness of prayer and be still and be in awe of God's love.

And finally, a couple of times I have felt a bit cool in the house and thought I might just crank up the thermostat a couple of degrees, but following the idea of being green for Lent, I have resisted that as well. Emitting less CO₂ from my car by driving more slowly and less distance has been a bit more of a challenge. But I have done a big load of recycling. So I can count a certain success on the green front.

And Finally...

All this snow and cold weather is just fine for Thumper, and he doesn't care about the thermostat in the house or the speed I drive, and me being still on walks also doesn't bother him. He always seems to be at peace!

With prayers, *Fr. David @ Thumper*



Our churches are open to those *without* any Covid symptoms.
But Covid is still a real threat – thus caution is needed!



Zoom Links – To Our Weekend Masses

Link to Weekend Masses

To get the link to our two weekend Masses please send an e-mail to one of our parish offices with your name and you will then receive the link each week.

info@holyfamilyfernie.ca

ElkValleyRC@gmail.com

Audio Only

Don't forget, if you don't have the internet but have a phone you can still listen to Mass via a phone call to our Zoom link.

Again, e-mail the office for the link for this.

Chat:

Feel free to greet people via the chat when you join our broadcast, and if you are praying for anything particular, do share this with others on the Chat.

Normally there is "IA - Chat (Co-Host)" who watches the chat for any problems or prayer intentions. If you don't want everyone to see your message you can send your message directly and it will remain private.

Waiting Room:

Please note when you log on you will be put in a "waiting room". Hopefully as soon as we see you waiting we will let you in. If there is a bit of a delay, please just wait; we will be with you as quickly as we can.

And for those who are attending church in person, be careful:

Please continue to be careful when you are in church. Please sanitise your hands, wear a mask if you wish and always think of the good of others. As you move about in church you might come within a 'breath distance' of others, and be conscious that others might have health vulnerabilities that you don't know about.

Everyone still needs to be careful.



I Vow to Thee, My Country

*I heard my country calling, away across the sea,
Across the waste of waters, she calls and calls to me.
Her sword is girded at her side, her helmet on her head,
And around her feet are lying the dying and the dead;
I hear the noise of battle, the thunder of her guns;
I haste to thee, my mother, a son among thy sons.*

*I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.*

*And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness,
*and all her paths are peace.**



Many versions of this hymn on YouTube will be taken from the Service of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall in London, that is always a moving occasion. But an alternative and perhaps slightly more prayerful rendition is by the British choirs school, 'Libera' from their album 'Angel Voices'. The link to Libera's official YouTube site is:

<https://youtu.be/uAkbIYMO4mU>

Lent Talk Details

As mentioned above, the talk this coming week (24th) will be at 1pm. The talks will last for about 45 minutes with questions to follow. The Zoom link will be active fifteen minutes before the start of each talk.

Each talk takes a different subject, so even if you miss one or more you are still welcome to join the subsequent talks.

The zoom link is below and it will be the same link for each of the talks, becoming active at 12:45am (Mountain time) next week – but see below for future weeks.

To get the link to our Lenten series of talks please send an e-mail to one of our parish offices with your name and you will then receive the link each week.

info@holyfamilyfernie.ca

ElkValleyRC@gmail.com

1pm Mountain Time on:

Thursday 24th March – Sister Bernadette Reis,
who works in Vatican Radio and Media.

12noon Mountain Time on:

Thursday 31st March – Mr. Jeremy Skelton, Religious Education Advisor
to the Plymouth Diocesan Schools.

Thursday 7th April – Prof. Anthony Towey, director of the ‘Centre for Catholic
Education, Research and Religious Literacy’
at St. Mary’s University in London, England.



Sister Bernadette Reis, Vatican Radio