

SECOND MEETING TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES

Over the past two months we have seen many acts of love and service in hospitals, schools, in our cities and homes. Personally, I have discovered that charity begins with those I live with. I am more convinced that, with the help of God and our good will, our home can really be the beginning of the Kingdom of God.

Three weeks ago, we had a parish meeting to share our experiences and it was focused on prayer and faith. We were all uplifted by listening to each other's words and stories. I would like to propose a second meeting, this time more focused on **charity and service**. You can prepare for the meeting answering one or more of the following questions:

- What difficulties and challenges do I have now in my relationship with others: family, friends and neighbours?
- What am I discovering about love and charity?
- Am I growing in my relationships with others?
- Have I noticed any gestures of charity/love that I would like to share with everyone?
- What lesson does God want to teach me with all of this?

Father Raffaele

Thelma Henderson

Thu 2020-05-14 10:09 PM

My name is Thelma Henderson and I am the Hospital Director at The Nuffield Wessex Hospital in Chandlers Ford. I also attend St Edwards Church on a Sunday morning with my 2 children. Nuffield Health is a charity which means all the profits from the hospital are but back into the hospital to spent on patients' comfort and the equipment required for the nurses and doctors to do their jobs.

As a little girl growing up in the West Coast of Ireland I was always fascinated about Florence Nightingale. I was always knowing that I would grow up to be a nurse and care for people. Some 23 years later and after many years working as a nurse and Matron I'm still passionate about healthcare and making a difference to patient's experience. I have been at the hospital for the last 18 months, having moved my young family from London to Hampshire. This week makes the 220th anniversary Florence Nightingales birth a very import week for all nurses.

Over the last 8 weeks ago all our lives changed from what we were use too, and so did the hospital, normally we are a surgical hospital admitting patients for

routine planned surgery, at the end of March all private hospitals agreed to help the NHS out with the management of patients during the feared Covid crisis. This meant over a period of a few weeks we cancelled all surgery cleared the hospital retrained all our staff as we waited to admit medical patients/ stroke patients and end of life care from Southampton.

I have watched with pride over the last few weeks the staff transform and care for very sick patients, speak to family on the phone who have not been able to visit their relatives in hospital giving them an update. On a Saturday afternoon I was phoned by the hospital as a patient was asking for the bible to be read to him, the nurses realise due to Infection Control we did not have any bible, I phoned Fr Raffaele and Phil kindly opened up the parish shop and I was able to purchase a bible for the hospital. I watched with pride a young 18-year-old theatre porter read the bible to a 92-year-old man who was dying over 3 days. To those of you who have lost a family and friend to coronavirus, who were being nursed in hospitals and care home, you may not have been with them but they did not die on their own, they were surrounded by the love and care of many nurses and carers.

I have also learned in the last few weeks the gratitude of the local community, over Easter Waitrose donated Easter Eggs to our patients and our staff along with shampoo and shower gel for the staff when finished their long shifts. Local people have made uniform bags to allow staff to safely take their uniform home, and wash it. People have made hairbands and clasps to allow us to wear masks without blistering the back of our ears. B&Q Head office donated plants and flowers to allow us to build a lovely staff garden to allow the staff to relax and enjoy the spring sunshine in peace and quiet. Last week our patients were able to enjoy lunch in the spring sunshine admiring the look and smell of the flowers in the garden. We recently put a post on local social media asking for donations of clothes as many patients in the hospital have no family able to visit and bring in essential clothes we were shocked with them amount we received. These are little things that have made a massive difference, to the patients and especially the staff. Outside of work I never really knew my neighbours I knew what they looked like but not much else, I now look forward to our Thursdays at 8pm, as we clap together on our door steps and check everybody is keeping well. How we have lived with in the last few months will take a long time to go away, the lives we lived will have changed and I know and hope this will be for the better, as I have realised the power of community spirit, and faith will see us through this.

Elizabeth Nash

Thu 2020-05-14 2:50 PM

Dear Fr Raffaele,

I have thought quite a lot about the last question that you suggested we could look at (What lesson does God want us to learn from all of this).

It isn't just one lesson, it's many I think. Being in lockdown just proves for me how necessary it is to keep in touch with family and friends and to reach out to those who don't have close family or true friends. With them we can spend **time**, listen to their worries and concerns and support them in any way we can. We have seen the goodness and kindness of others in the many ways they have sought to help people they do not know. I am thinking of the NHS staff and all key workers. It is important that, when this is all over, we must not lose this sense of responsibility for the welfare of everyone.

The overwhelming effect of the virus infection is an example of how life circumstances can change quickly in ways we cannot foresee, leaving us with things we did, or did not do, that we regret too late. If it is important, do it now. I would like to finish with something I took from Fr Marco's homily last Tuesday, the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima.

So to love and act according to God's will –

We offer our body so that Jesus can continue to live in us and we can be Christ to others.

We offer our hands to help the poor and those in need.

We offer our feet to meet our families and friends, and those we may not know so well.

We offer our arms to support others when they are struggling.

We offer our hearts to show love and act as Jesus would want us to.

These words are, for me, what charity and service are all about.

Elizabeth Nash

Jeremy Brown

Fri 2020-05-15 2:25 PM

Dear Father,

My name is Jeremy, and I am currently the ward manager at Romsey Hospital. I have been a nurse for over 25 years, having trained initially in Portsmouth. My career to date has been varied, though mainly has been in Intensive care, my most recent post was as Matron at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester which I left late last year when an opportunity came up in Romsey. It is a privilege to support our local community in this way, as the patients and staff at the hospital reside in our locality.

When COVID hit and the revelations of its potential impact arrived, the health service went into overdrive, attempting to ensure that there was bed availability for those who were critically ill, but equally that community hospital settings were ready to admit more patients with a varying range of conditions. This all happened literally overnight, and Romsey, I am proud to say, stood up to the challenge. In the meantime, I was asked to return to Intensive Care to support for

a short period during the peak of the virus in March. This meant an interim manager was found to support Romsey and the team there.

When asked about what I am discovering about love and charity, I see this in so many ways throughout my day, and even more so over the past months. We have had very challenging times in healthcare, as everyone knows. Seeing patients, relatives and staff frightened of the unknown. Seeing friends, family and colleagues succumb to the virus. Seeing patients scared, in hospital, as they are unable to see their friends and family. The holding of a hand in these times always gives me strength knowing that in some small way I am helping those who are sick and vulnerable by showing love. I had a case recently where one of my patients sadly was dying of the virus and its subsequent complications. A former nurse, this elderly lady had no living relatives however had close friends and carers. She was a delightful lady and knew she had been placed on an end of life pathway in the hospital. Her spiritual needs were met by me inviting her local chaplain from the Church of England. Her last hours, she was not alone. Her hand was held and she relaxed in the warmth of another's hand against hers.

The following passage has given me strength in these times:

'And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: It is more blessed to give than to receive' Acts 20:35.

I do feel blessed to be able to support those in need, patients, relatives and staff alike, certainly during these times. I personally gain strength being able to help. I feel the presence of God each day, in the smiles and tears of those I nurse, in the teamwork my team at Romsey Hospital is showing in these times, in the collaboration of our communities which I see, and in the relief in my patient's relatives voices when I speak to them about how their loved one is doing.

To conclude, I feel privileged and honoured to work in healthcare during these times of crisis. Each week the public graciously applaud key-workers for what we do, but let it be known that albeit I am very humbled about this, it is our role to care for the vulnerable and support the ill. This last passage again certainly affirms my belief.

'When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do – blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get.' Matthew 6:2.

God bless,
Jeremy

Liam Brady

Fri 2020-05-15 9:28 AM

Dear Father,

I am shielding for at least 12 weeks because I am in the extremely clinically vulnerable group, so I haven't been able to get out much, which on the positive side has given me an opportunity to catch up in with reading etc., that I haven't been able to do when at the office.

I frequently think about the Aquinas treatise on sadness and in particular the quote "Sorrow can be alleviated by good sleep, a bath and a glass of wine". As well as good practical guidance it makes me smile. Ratzinger wrote about this quite a bit before he was Pope Benedict as there is a serious message underpinning the quote. I think the message is that we are often consumed with busyness and so put our spiritual life on hold. Right now is a great time to be attending to the spiritual life when stillness is forced upon us.

Kind Regards,

Liam

Anonymous

Wed 5/13/2020 11:13 AM

Dear Fr. Raffaele,

I have considered one of the questions you have posed.

The first one relates to what difficulties and challenges I have now in relationships with others, family, friends and neighbours.

What I have found is that it seems so much easier to show love and charity from a distance! I have no problem with being patient and kind and charitable to those outside of my home. I will talk for hours on the phone to friends and family and happily listen to all their worries and concerns. I willingly and enjoy doing small jobs for others outside of the home, e.g. posting letters, shopping etc. The difficulty for me is showing that same level of patience, kindness and understanding in the home. This lockdown has brought me and probably many others into prolonged proximity with other family members.

The words you quoted from St Henry Newman struck me with a feeling of guilt.

"Those immediately about us,

Submit to their wishes

Bearing with their infirmities

Overcoming their occasional waywardness."

I fail on all accounts.

The longer the imposed isolation continues the more I find I become intolerant of what are really very small inconsequential things. For example, a saucepan is put

back into the wrong cupboard. A light has been left on. The standard of tidiness and cleaning is not as mine. They did not finish eating the food I had prepared. All of these small things can make me very grumpy. The victim in all of this is my sister who has to put up with me being moody or grumpy over very minor things of no real importance.

I know I need to change and there is an expression that "charity begins at home." For me this is the hardest thing of all. We often hurt the ones we love most of all. Maybe it is because we believe that they are more likely to forgive us, whereas others may not.

I suppose what I need to learn is how to cherish that Love that is given to me by those so close to me and do not take it or them for granted.

Jesus gave us His Love and understanding. I know I must do the same.
God bless.

Chiara Dall'Ora

Thu 2020-05-14 9:24 AM

Dear Fr Raffaele,

During this lockdown, I constantly hear the invitation of Jesus in John's gospel, "Love one another as I have loved you." Only when I discover and embrace Jesus' love for me, I can love others, too.

Perhaps because I am spending more time with myself as opposed to being always surrounded by other people, sometimes I feel discouraged lately, especially by my limits and imperfections.

I found that these moments of sadness have been, to my amazement, the best occasions to discover Jesus' love for me. If when I feel low, I transform my sadness into prayer, into a dialogue with Him, everything changes. The focus moves from myself and the image of the ideal self to Him.

Only when I do that, and beg Him to come and show His face to me, I start seeing the signs of His love for me: the beauty of the Gospel every day, which often seems to be written exactly for me; the tenderness of a friend, who texts me and says a kind word, or who writes a lovely card for my birthday, or buys flowers for me even if they can't deliver them to me because of the lockdown; the joy of seeing virtually our friends' children, who keep showing their simple love for us; the kindness of a colleague who offers to help with a difficult task; and, last but not least, the love of my husband.

This love of God for me fills my heart so much that I want to give it back to others. So I find myself doing things I would not be doing normally, and which can cost time and effort, like for example calling some parishioners who I know live by themselves and perhaps feel a bit low; calling my mum everyday – I have never been a mummy's girl, and would normally speak with her only once a week – but now I want to make sure she's OK and to encourage her when she feels

down; also speaking with some relatives I was quite upset with for some things they did, and even sending them “virtual” flowers to cheer them up.

I have not suddenly become a philanthropist or a hero. I am simply opening my eyes to God’s love for me, and this love invites me to be a channel of His love.

God bless,

Chara Dall’Ora

Bas Bush

Tue 2020-05-12 9:01 PM

Dear Fr. Raffaele,

I am a member of the Catenian Association.

The Catenians have a motto ‘Strengthening family life through friendship and faith’. It doubles as a marketing slogan used extensively on our banners, posters and in our leaflets.

Family, friendship, faith - three words that have informed, influenced and helped to shape my personal response to the voice of God during these challenging days. To that we can add neighbours, love and charity. All six words are intertwined.

Faith

I am living in the belief that normality will return. I am spending time in the garden. All is normal. The flowers are blooming, the sun is shining and the grass is green.

Normality will return. My faith tells me that God isn't seeking to punish us, but maybe He is saying “return, but not to the normality you had before, but a new and better one”. History records that the desire to rebuild after VE day in 1945 was not a desire to recreate the 1930’s but a drive in the 1950’s to establish something different and better. Maybe that’s God’s desire now.

We have seen in the use of technology how beneficial it can be. I’ve noticed how easy it has been to ignore the telephone whilst participating in (not watching) Sunday Mass and how easy it has been to say to friends later “Sorry I didn’t answer the phone, I was at church”. I detect a measure of curiosity amongst non-church going friends who ask me how effectively it works. I describe that we construct an altar on a small table with a lit, blessed candle and crucifix and send them the You Tube link by email; I know it has been used.

Five weeks ago my wife, Ingrid, phoned the 92 year old widowed mother of a neighbour who Ingrid supports whilst her family are abroad for 3 months annually. In conversation she told Ingrid that the only regret she had in life was that she didn't come from a church family and because of that her husband stopped going to the Church of England when they married. Ingrid asked if she would like to see an online church service. She asked if a C of E service was available. Ingrid found a local church service and explained how she could access it. She watched her first church service and phoned to say how much she had enjoyed it. She died suddenly last Saturday.

Family, Love and Charity

We live every day physically and socially distanced from our two sons who are married and living abroad. For one of them with a young family of three children it has been a challenging time.

Although 10,000 miles away, the family have reached out to us for love and support. Not financial, but to help them chart a way forward so that they can continue to live their lives in peace and fulfill God's plan for their family to be productive and useful. It has been rewarding, beneficial and brought us closer together as we contemplate being far apart for much longer than we would choose.

We also have a third child, a 10 year old Indian girl named Gowri, who we sponsor at a Children's Village run by a Catholic charity in Tamil Nadu, Southern India. Gowri is a semi orphan whose mother died soon after Gowri's birth leaving her with a father and young sister in a village with no basic facilities to provide care and education. Their father, without the means to feed them and in a community that lacks clean water and sanitation took them to the charity when she was 2 years old, where they were accepted for care and support. But the virus has no respect for boundaries and the Indian Government ordered organisations caring for disadvantaged children to send all non-orphan children to their relatives in their native villages where possible. Vulnerable children like Gowri and her sister are back in households that do not have the means to feed or shelter them. We are attempting to find news of her, but we understand that the family should be receiving food parcels from the charity and we are sending extra money to help.

Friendship and Neighbours

These days have provided an opportunity to recognise that the search for God isn't just confined to a church or private prayer.

For me it has meant reaching out, not with the hand, but with the phone of friendship. As chairman of a large pensioners club I have assembled a welfare support structure for 350 members to provide a designated contact system to mitigate the concern of loneliness. With the Catenians, similarly, a buddy scheme is in place for widows and a small group contact arrangement keeps all of our members in touch with one another.

This is not 'confetti' friendship at the touch of a button, selfie's distributed to a mass audience of so called friends via 'Whats App', but genuine friendship, care and interest in our neighbours, other children of God.

"Who is my neighbour?" asked the lawyer. Whilst the attention of countries has focused on national issues and the media prioritise debate about 'flattening the curve', the number of tests and semantics about words used by government, advantage is being taken and not broadcast of horrendous abuse in parts of the world not far from our shores. Our second son in Vienna is speaking out on behalf of the UK Government about restrictions imposed on security monitoring and the

potential for gender based violence under the guise of Coronavirus measures. None of it is published or broadcast.

As a family we live daily on the international stage, but whilst it is understandable that domestic concerns predominate for many, we should not forget that in the global arena our neighbours are in need of even greater support. If ability to help financially is limited, the altars of our churches at home provide an opportunity to include them in our prayers.

For me this experience is one of recognition and belief, not so much of God teaching us a lesson but perhaps of God the messenger saying to us "I'm pleased that you have what you have, but I implore you to pause, reflect, and use your time and resources more wisely."

I reflect that maybe, through this global pandemic, God's message is that no longer should the division between developed and less developed countries, between 1st and 3rd world classification exist, but that there is just one world, 'God's world' that should be reformed and remoulded with better equality, love, faith and charity.

God bless,

Bas Bush

Glenda Hinton

Thu 2020-05-14 4:07 PM

Dear Fr Raffaele

I'm submitting some reflections to your questions.

Firstly, the love and charity I see happening around us is the people in the hospitals, care homes and in the community laying down their lives in caring for people with Covid19. A lot of carers have become ill with the virus and a number of these people have died of Covid19. Knowing our priests are administering the Sacrament of the Sick to patients is also a most important act of love and charity. Likewise, people helping with shopping for others is a loving act. God is working in all these people. I take part in acknowledging what these lovely people have done on a Thursday evening at my front door clapping and blowing my whistle along with other neighbours in my Close - we are all in solidarity.

Secondly, my relationship with my family has remained close and I speak more often to my son and daughter living in Australia which is great. I love them all dearly and thank God for them. My relationship with a few of our parishioners has grown. I ring them regularly and because they do not have the internet I try and keep them up to date with what is going on in our parish. We have chatted a lot and learnt more about each other. People need people and it is a two-way communication where we have grown closer and more so in this situation because we share faith. Not forgetting the School of Community meetings and my friends.

Thirdly, I believe God is teaching me patience. He has given me this wonderful opportunity to pray more and grow closer to Him and put my trust in Him. I am not able to have a human embrace as I live alone but Our Lord embraces me daily.

God Bless

Glenda

John Marchesi

Thu 2020-05-14 3:57 PM

Dear Father Raffaele,

Pam and I are fortunate to have received very much help from a local group of volunteers who do our weekly shopping for us. We are in a vulnerable group and we cannot get deliveries from supermarkets. Every week, it is a different person, and we are impressed how helpful all these people are. I try to walk every day and have noticed that people are more willing to greet you in the street than they have been in the past. This is what it used to be like many years ago. We are also lucky to be able to speak to our family every day.

We have found that before the lockdown, we always seemed to be busy, but now we have more time for simple things, and we pray more often. The daily Mass is a great benefit in this respect. We spend less money, especially as we only use our car very occasionally. We have decided to give some of this money to a local food bank, which helps families who are not as fortunate as we are.

It is our hope that many of these good things that we are experiencing will continue after the current emergency is over.

May God bless you and your colleagues.

Sincerely,

John and Pam

Dominic Lodge

Thu 2020-05-14 9:03 AM

Dear Father Raffaele

Thank you for the kind invitation.

When thinking about relationship I go back to Maundy Thursday. At the heart of relationship is love and service. As Jesus washed his disciple's feet such a powerful and wonderful message was given - love and service.

There is an old saying:

"When you help, you see life as weak.

When you fix, you see life as broken.

When you serve, you see life as whole."

Fixing and helping are good things in the right context. However, they can be the work of the ego - look how wonderful and needed I am! Service is always the work of the soul.

During this time, I have seen so many acts of service - at home, at work and in the neighbourhood I live in.

God is teaching me to let go of my sometimes bloated ego and to embrace service. To start with what is strong in my neighbour, my family, our Church and not with what is wrong!

With every blessing,
Dominic

Madeline Wood

Wed 2020-05-13 9:03 PM

Dear Fr Raffaele

We have sadly had a bereavement in the last week - my much loved brother in France. Although he had been unwell for a couple of years the end came very quickly and because of Covid-19 he was taken on his own by ambulance to hospital. He deteriorated quickly and died in his sleep two days later. It had been heartbreaking that none of the family here have been able to go and be with my sister in law or attend the funeral. The funeral was a 15 minute service at the crematorium with only his wife, daughter and grandson attending.

At the same time as the funeral, we arranged a family get together via Zoom for the family here to remember my brother and support each other. We hoped that would bring some comfort to his wife who was struggling so much. It was not the same as being there but being connected in love got us through.

I sent my sister in law a short message on the morning of the funeral saying we would be with her in spirit and hoped she would feel enfolded by our love.

The following was her reply later in the day:

Oh Madeleine, you don't know how much your message meant, this morning I almost felt ill with grief and then read your lovely message about being enfolded by your love and I suddenly felt I could go on, and I did, it was a beautiful funeral very moving and warm, a lovely way to say our goodbyes to Peter. Having gone through all this yourself you'll know what it's like.

Nothing could illustrate more the power of love even in the most awful circumstances. A few words of love - costs nothing yet means everything.

The power of love, a smile, a few kind words; little acts of love - we never know how much they might mean to someone.

Kind regards
Madeleine

Elizabeth Brannon

Tue 12/05/2020 13:04

Dear Fr Raffaele,

What difficulties and challenges do I have now in my relationship with others: family, friends and neighbours?

I think that humans are naturally sociable creatures so not being able to visit family and friends is hard for everyone. But I think the lockdown has brought us a new challenge in having to make extra effort with those people, especially the ones in our household. We are all locked up so I am having to find ways to communicate with my family effectively so as not to upset anyone nor cause any resentment in the way that I ask for help or support at the same time as trying to help and support them.

What am I discovering about love and charity?

We are all in this situation together! We all need time together and we all need alone time too - we are very honest about needing to take a 'time out' and try to be understanding that being in a house together 24 hours a day has its challenges, but communication, love and faith help.

Am I growing in my relationships with others?

I feel much closer to my immediate family and try to call my parents every day - they are stuck at home and not used to a 'quiet' house!!!! I also have made more effort to get in touch with family and friends that I have not seen for a long time and having WhatsApp and Zoom have been invaluable.

Have I noticed any gestures of charity/love that I would like to share with everyone?

It begins at home! I volunteered for the NHS to help with lonely people needing someone to talk to but due to the number of volunteers and the system set-up I have not had any tasks to do yet, then I realised that taking the time to speak to my family and friends is the charity and love and support that they and I need at the moment, so I try to call as many people I know as often as I can.

What lesson does God want to teach me with all of this?

That we are challenged in different ways and it is how we deal with these challenges that defines us. I think he is trying to guide us in our appreciation of the little things in life: our love for each other, the environment we live in and looking after each other and our planet.

Elizabeth Brannon

June Wilson

Wed 5/13/2020 9:07 AM

Dear Father, my experience.

My main difficulty has been my feeling of uselessness, not looking after my grandson and sharing his activities.

Positively I am growing in my relationships with people. This is not natural to me, I have not phoned friends and family in years. Now I do it, I am determined I will not take them for granted again.

The Holy Spirit helps me when I am sad and shows me the way when I don't know what to do.

Best wishes

June

Veronica Nanson

Wed 5/13/2020 11:29 AM

Dear Fr Raffaele,

In the main, my relationships with neighbours have become more friendly. On either side of me are young professionals with children. Before all of this we would share a good morning etc, when we saw each other, but now it's a friendly chat (or should I say shout) over the six foot fence if we hear each other in the garden.

I miss the hugs we would share at church and the friendly banter. On the upside, some of these people show up on Zoom at our Rosary, so I can see that they appear well. However, I do wonder about those I don't see, are they alright, how are they coping?

It is strange to say, but my relationship with my husband now has achieved a new depth. As the children grew up, we lost time for ourselves. When the children left home, we found other outside interests but now we are back to being 'us.' We do crosswords together, play cards, dominoes but we are re-uniting in our love for each other. We show consideration and a new level of understanding.

I have lost my freedom to go where I would want and to be with whom I wish. But God has given me the gift of being able to say I am sorry, when I am in the wrong, to appreciate what I have, and a contentment in my soul. And I can face any obstacle because I know He is with me.

Veronica

Mary Vokes

Wed 5/13/2020 5:21 PM

Dear Fr Raffaele,

What am I discovering about love and charity?

For the most part God has shone through in everyone. Priests, friends, neighbours have all rallied to the call. The Zoom groups are an inspiration. The impromptu street gatherings and socials have become common place. The only human interaction some get.

Am I growing in my relationships with others?

Yes, I have formed closer bonds with my family and God. Mass and rosary every day has become my new habit. I find more time to speak to, cook with, play games and engage with my boys.

The removal of activities and clubs has for the most part been a Godsend. No running from place to place taxiing people left, right and centre.

Have I noticed any gestures of charity/love that I would like to share with everyone?

A friend left a bunch of flowers on my door step with a note, "missing you."

What lesson does God want to teach me with all of this?

I always find myself saying the best thing in life are free or it's the simple things that matter. This experience has magnified that more.

Thanks

Mary

Jenny Walsh

Thu 2020-05-14 8:39 PM

Hello Father Raffaele,

Our children live miles away from us, the three boys and their families live in the Midlands and our daughter lives in France. In the past, we contacted each other quite irregularly and it was often a case of... 'Oh dear, I haven't spoken to so I'd better get in touch.'

During the lockdown we have had much more contact and, best of all, we have used Zoom to have family get-togethers. It began on Mother's Day, when for the first time in years, I had all four of them for a chat and especially to lecture us on what we could and could not do in the changed circumstances. (When did they take over the parenting skills?)

As we begin to see an end to this awful time, I hope we can remember that there have been some benefits and keep them in our future.

God bless,

Jenny Walsh

Clare Dickson

Fri 2020-05-15 1:35 AM

Dear Fr Raffaele,

As I'm sure is the case in many households, it feels in lots of ways as if the last seven weeks or so have passed in rather a blur. The constant flow of illness and recovery with different family members at different stages at different times has

been a challenge but one I feel we are emerging from as a stronger and closer family unit.

It has been a joy for us to watch the children mature and learn to try and put each other's needs before their own. It was rather a shock for us all to be thrust into lockdown with no escape from each other! But in amongst the tensions of being in such constant close quarters there have been lovely moments of generosity and kindness. Daniel has been taking time out to help Jake with school work he is finding tricky, Jake has been setting up games to keep his little sister amused. Lucy has been "helping" me with jobs around the house!

Having the virus in our house has made us very aware of each other's feelings. Love and kindness are helping us through the difficult times. When Daniel was so poorly, Jake and Lucy worked together to cheer him up, creating beautiful artwork to stick around his bed and perhaps the kindest thing of all, they were quiet and gentle around him!

We have all had to become more accepting of each other and give and take has taken on new meaning. The more well have helped the less well, family bonds have been strengthened and we have muddled through together!

God bless,

Clare Dickson

Edith Bosman

Fri 2020-05-15 12:05 PM

Hello Father Raffaele,

Just a short reflection on things that I have experienced during the last few weeks. I have experienced lots of kindness and have been overwhelmed by it all. On our return from our holiday the UK was in lockdown, so we were a little concerned about the situation, for example getting home from the airport, having enough food and seeing family and friends and everyone being safe. We were very fortunate to be surrounded by family and friends. My niece organised us transport home with someone she knows which was a great relief.

On arriving home we had a lovely welcome from our neighbours. We had notes put in our letter boxes from two neighbours offering us help and one brought us a parcel of groceries. My son and Irene also passed by with groceries and offered more help if we required as we had to self isolate for two weeks. We have been overwhelmed by this show of love and kindness. It has not stopped there, we have had phone calls and emails asking if we were well. One of the calls that really touched me was from a lady that is disabled. She wanted to know how we were despite having her own difficulties. I was overwhelmed and humbled by this experience. This has opened my eyes. Everyone can contribute in showing care and love for each other in different ways.

I have noticed a change in our neighbours. It is bringing people closer. On Thursdays most people come out of their homes to wave at each other and are

united in clapping their hands in appreciation for all those working and risking their lives for the benefit of others in this pandemic.

I think that God is showing me that he has given us the gift of love and he wants us to share it.

Thank you

Edith

Angie Cagampang

Sat 2020-05-16 11:56 AM

Dear Fr Raffaele,

I am amazed by the generosity of the nurses in the ICU, that despite their long hours caring for our loved ones, they still manage to give us comfort. The nurses took a picture of my husband holding a board which says, "Happy birthday, love from dad", and emailed this to us. It was the most precious gift my daughter received on her birthday.

I thank the Lord for allowing my husband to get better each day. And I thank You all in our Parish Community for all the prayers and support you have given us. In this difficult time, I have learnt to be even more patient and to put my trust in God because I know He is always there for us.

Angie

Josie Moody

Fri 2020-05-15 12:49 PM

Hi Fr. Raffaele,

Some of my observations on charity and service:

1. Family ties are even stronger as important qualities of love and care for each other shine through! Do you notice questions like "How are you?" and "How are you coping?" are more genuine now?
2. Do you notice that people listen more attentively?
3. People are more respectful to others ranging from walkers you meet to supermarket staff.
4. More charitable events are taking place and people are willing to give for the common good.
5. Teaching and support staff at Springhill have donated money etc for food parcels for a growing number of our families who are facing difficult times about putting food on the table - a real lifeline.
6. It may be difficult for some of us to imagine not having the money to provide food for your children or where the next meal is coming from? We shall support these families for as long as we need to.

7. The appreciation and true gratitude from these families is overwhelming!
8. Is it me...or are people thinking more of others than themselves?

Many thanks,
Josie

PS. Do you notice the birds are singing more loudly?

Luciana and Susan Lacey

Thu 2020-05-14 6:24 PM

Dear Father Raffaele,

What difficulties and challenges do I have now in my relationship with others: family, friends and neighbours?

The main difficulty for us is not being able to see each other face to face. We have a close family connection. We like to meet up regularly for catch up coffee's and we are missing attending church together.

Friends are important to us too. Not being able to share thoughts and feelings with close friends in a face to face situation is tough.

We are feeling very distant from this.

However on the flip side to this, we appreciate how lucky we are to have family and friends around us who we can call to keep in touch.

We are still doing things for each other. For example, collecting shopping for one another and leaving kind gifts on the doorstep whilst friends are out on their daily walks.

What am I discovering about love and charity?

Mainly, just how important it is. To care for someone or something is so special.

Being away from the people you love the most is so difficult but knowing you love and pray for them every day is comforting.

Being happy to help people in need is so great.

Am I growing in my relationships with others?

Most definitely. Having a bit more time, there is more time and effort available to think about this and apply ourselves differently. Considering other personality types and how they might be feeling in these difficult times.

Have I noticed any gestures of charity/love that I would like to share with everyone?

Yes, we have seen this a lot. When out for walks, people seem so much more friendly and keen to speak, even just to say hello. One particular example being- My neighbour left some daffodils on our door step, just as a kind gesture with a lovely message. Such a thoughtful thing to do.

What lesson does God want to teach me with all of this?

We believe that God would want us to take this time to reflect on the normal life before this awful virus. And have more of an appreciation of what and who we have in our lives.

And pray for all those poor people that have lost their lives and the family and friends they have left behind.

Best wishes

Luciana & Susan

Fr Raffaele Cossa

Conclusion of the meeting.

After listening to your contributions, I would like to highlight three points that you touched on.

1. Love begins with those who are close to us. True love is not love for the world and for humanity in general, but love for those who are immediately about us: our family and children, our friends and parishioners, those I work with: my patients in the hospital, my colleagues...
2. We are experiencing the strong link between love and faith. Someone said, "When I remember the love of God for me, I become able to love others." In Christianity everything is connected. Faith and charity are the two hands that help each other, one leads to the other: our love leads us to a stronger faith and our faith takes us to a better love.
3. We are experiencing what it means to be fully human. Before the virus we might have worked with people without truly engaging with them. Now we are asked to engage in a comprehensive way, we have to give material, emotional and spiritual support; because maybe we are the only one they are in contact with. If we work in a hospital for example, we have to be a doctor, a nurse, a mother, a friend, a priest for our patients. We are growing in humanity!

Have a good evening!