

A Message from the Chaplain

Mass on the Eve of a Second Lockdown

Gathering this evening is the last time we gather before the new lockdown begins. And there are a lot of reasons for us to be concerned about what happens from here until Advent. Perhaps people will be concerned that, despite not admitting members of the general public, we intend to continue to meet and worship together as a Household, as the Chapel of Workplace, and as a defacto College Chapel, in numbers which, however small, are greater than any parish church might feel able to include under the current restrictions - perhaps people will be concerned in case we are failing in our New Testament vocation “be subject to the governing authorities”. Perhaps people will be concerned of the pain our limited group meeting together might cause in our brothers and sisters who cannot meet or share with us bodily. Perhaps people will be concerned that the live streaming of our services in this period reflects an uncritical acceptance of technology as a good, which belies our recognition of its potentially corrosive or corrupting power in our culture. Or concerned that in making our worship accessible on-line we are unintentionally endorsing an anti-incarnational or gnostic conceit that the corporate is unnecessary, and the virtual sufficient. All these concerns are rightly felt. All these dangers must be addressed in humility before God - open to correction, and indeed to altered or tightened regulation - and praying for the grace to be faithful, obedient and loving in each of these areas of legitimate consideration.

As such it feels to important to affirm explicitly what we are and are not seeking to do in our various choices to meet, and to abstain from meeting, over the next month.

We confess repeatedly in our liturgy that the body of which we are a part - the risen Christ’s body - is a mystical one. But as we enter again a period in which many Christian members of that body cannot bodily partake of the sacrament of its union - cannot bodily participate in the corporate life of the Body of Christ, by gathering as the ecclesia - it is

vital for us to acknowledge that although the Mystical Body is more than simply material; although it transcends space in incorporating the universal church, and transcends time in encompassing the church militant, penitent and triumphant; although our unity in the Spirit extends beyond any local manifestation of itself, this vast mystical body is a bodily reality - it is emphatically not virtual in the contemporary sense of that word - but supremely actual. It is called - we are called - throughout all generations to “not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching)” - because every bodily communion in microcosm makes present the coming reality that is the Church “fully grown up in all things, into him which is its risen head, even Christ”.

We will be bodily resurrected, and bodily united in the Spirit, as the very Body of Christ, and our meeting together is a sacrament of that ultimate reality.

So we must seek to meet together - and to partake of the sacraments of our bodily communion - as much as we are able. And where we are not able - we should embrace every possibility which is available to us, of bodily approaching that desired state:

If we can bodily enter into communion just by praying at the same time we know our brothers and sisters to be praying, we should do that.

If we can bodily enter into communion by praying at the same time, standing and kneeling when they stand and kneel, then we should do that.

If we can bodily enter into communion by praying aloud at the same time, standing and kneeling, and using our ears to listen to their broadcast prayers, then we should do that.

If we can bodily enter into communion by praying at the same time, standing, kneeling, using our ears to listen and our eyes to see the stream of their worship, then we should do that.

If we can bodily enter into communion praying at the same time, standing and kneeling and using our ears and eyes and speech in the same space, then we should do that.

And if any of us can bodily enter into communion praying, standing and kneeling and using our ears and eyes and speech together - at the same time and in the same space - and partaking of the blessed sacrament, then surely we must do that.

And while we do - while we bodily participate to the fullest extent our circumstances will allow - we must all cry out, as we ought always to do in every Eucharist and Gathering, for all those who are not yet bodily participating; for all those ways that we do not yet fully, corporately participate in Christ's resurrection life; for all that is not yet gathered in the final reconciliation of all things - cry out, in other words, for the coming of the Bridegroom in whose bodily absence we wait, and persevere, and fast, longing and crying maranatha, even as we celebrate his sacramental presence in our midst, but most especially when we cannot.

So I would encourage you to join in with the worship of the House in whatever way you can, and join in with the appeal of our Bishops, and fast each Thursday of lockdown, and to pray - for deliverance from this plague, for those who are now suffering it's effects, and for that bodily union, to which we are called, to be known in ever greater degree until it is fully realised on earth as it is in Heaven.

And explicitly as part of that praying - to come now, those of us who can, and bodily join our prayers with the constant intercession of the One who sits bodily at the right hand of the Father as we make present in this place the coming reality of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.