

On Sunday, and for future Sundays until we can go back to church, we shall be putting a recorded Eucharist on the parish website, on YouTube and on our social media platforms. I know from many emails I've received in the past week how much last week's service was appreciated.

Here is an extract from an article posted last week by Canon Dr Grant Bayliss, a Canon of Christ Church, Oxford. (The article can be found at <https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/blog/thoughts-cloistered-house>) Dr Bayliss wrote this while in self-isolation. In it he considers what it means to make a 'spiritual communion' and shows its long Anglican pedigree. We offer this today to help us all prepare for this Sunday's service:

'All my life I've found hope in the darkness by going to church. I've been to evangelical ones and Anglo-Catholic ones, Quaker meeting houses rich in silence, Orthodox churches bright with icons, vast cavernous Cathedrals (not Christ Church obviously!) and chapels with barely room for two or three. And everywhere I've met people and met God.

'At the heart of that has been the eucharist – a reliable moment of grace, a tangible encounter that I can touch, taste, smell, as God's presence is made known through the very matter of creation. Many of my old students will remember me going on (and on, and on) in Sacraments classes that 'matter matters', and, to misquote Thomas Aquinas, that 'we can't hope to understand anything with our minds that we haven't grasped with our physical senses first'.

'So what do I do when the matter has been taken away? When I can't touch the blessed bread or taste the wine?

'Well, this Sunday, I'll be making a 'spiritual communion'. It's an old idea that was important in the medieval Church and has often got a little lost or confused. But even when the Reformers rewrote our service books to bring back all the tasting and the touching, restoring the breaking of real bread and the sharing of a common cup to the people, it found a home in the new Anglican theology of Cranmer's 1549 Prayer Book. At the end of his service for 'the Order for Visitation of the Sick and the Communion of the Same', he wrote:

*But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for want of warning in due time to the Curate, or for lack of company to receive with him, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, the Curate shall instruct him, that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and stedfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefore, he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his Soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament in his mouth.*

'And there it has stayed through all the editions ever since. A little disclaimer – or small print, if you like – that, even as the main Communion service put a renewed and powerful emphasis on eating and drinking, on God coming close through the chosen things of his creation, he was never limited. God chooses sacraments like

the eucharist to meet us but he never said he would *only* meet us there, *only* love us *if* we physically ate, *only* bless us *if* we literally drank.

'Cloistered up in Cloister House as a precautionary measure to protect my wife, I can't claim 'extremity of sickness' but there is another 'just impediment' that means not just I but almost all of us cannot receive the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. So on Sunday at 10am I'll be watching Facebook to see Bishop Steven celebrate the eucharist I know so well – he'll only be a hundred metres away, yet it may as well be miles for all I can't be with him.

'But I will watch and I will pray. I will repent me of my sins and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ has suffered death upon the cross for me, for you, for the whole world. I will remember Christ's benefits to me and give hearty thanks.

'And as Bishop Steven lifts up the bread and holds the cup, I will cross myself and pray like St Thomas, 'My Lord and my God!'. And be reassured by the Prayer Book and the testimony of Christians throughout the ages that I am eating and drinking spiritually the body and blood of our Saviour Christ, profitably to my soul's health, although I do not receive the sacrament with my mouth.

'Wherever you are this Sunday and whatever you do, while our churches are shut and so many self-isolating, may you know God's love, his presence and his peace.'

To which one can only say, "Amen", and thank you to Dr Bayliss for this helpful and timely reflection.