

PASTORAL LETTER 4

from Bishop Jonathan
to the parishes and clergy of the See of Ebbsfleet



29 June 2020
SS Peter and Paul, Apostles

Dear brothers and sisters,
Dear friends,

Last Tuesday we heard the announcement that, from 4 July places of worship will be able to reopen for public worship. We welcome this news with great joy. All the clergy know that for the laity of the Church, and for many retired clergy, this is a big moment, even if it comes with its own concerns. Three months is a long time: a long time to be unable to share in the gathering of the Church around Christ, to hear the assurance of sins forgiven, to hear the Gospel, to receive the sacrament, to be sent out renewed in mission. Now, with our clergy and friends, we can look forward to celebrating in the Holy Eucharist the central mysteries of our faith—joyful, sorrowful and glorious—in our churches.

The recent reopening of churches for individual prayer was an important milestone on the way. Those parishes that have been able to open up have put in place everything needed to ensure the risk of virus transmission are minimized. This includes effective hand sanitisation, physical distancing, and cleaning. Our church remains committed to making sure these systems of hygiene and infection control meet proper public health standards. Those parishes that have not been able to do that yet (and this is not a competition) must pass through that stage as they return to public worship.

All the bishops of The Society would join me I am sure in thanking everyone in our communities for sustaining the life of faith in such creative ways, not least in your homes, with or alongside your families. I thank our clergy too for celebrating the Eucharist faithfully for you, and for the innovative ways in which they have enabled participation through technology and other means even though they are not always very reliable. There have also been many instances of special care for those who have found this time of deprivation especially difficult, in particular for those who have been bereaved. It is now time to gather up so much that we have learnt – and not least the experience of living more by faith than by habit – and look forward, to a future that is in God's hands.

It is clear that we cannot simply return to how things were before the lockdown. But we remain entirely centred on the Lord Jesus, and living out his commands at the Last Supper, 'love one another as I have loved you', and 'do this in memory of me'. With Christ at the centre—the Eucharist at the centre—and holding fast to all that the Gospel and Christian tradition gives us, we shall have to find creative ways to meet changed and demanding circumstances.

Over the coming weeks it's worth remembering ...

- that this next step is not, in any sense, a moment when we are going 'back to normal.' There will be a limit on the number of people who can attend church on any one occasion. This will be determined locally in accordance with distancing and hygiene requirements. So it's important to reflect carefully on how and when to attend Mass.

- our priests may need to consider whether it is possible to celebrate additional Masses at the weekends, and you may wish to consider the possibility of attending Mass on a weekday. This will ease the pressure on your church's capacity at this next stage, and allow a gradual return to the Eucharist for more people.
- there will still be many people who cannot attend Mass in person. Clergy and PCCs may wish to consider whether while the infection persists, livestreaming continues to have a role in supporting the faith of those who because of age or illness are housebound. There may need to be an increased capacity of Eucharistic ministers to take the Sacrament to such people.
- *for the time being* there will be some differences in how the celebration takes place in church. The Mass will be shorter than usual, because the longer the service the wider the physical spacing needed. Nor will there be any congregational or choral singing. We ask everyone to respect and follow the guidance that will be issued and the instructions in each church. None of them will detract from the centrality – the beauty, and the joy – of our encounter with the Risen Christ in the Eucharist.
- the lockdown has prompted remarkable acts of charity, and loving kindness, from Anglicans and other Christians across our communities as they have cared for—and continue to seek out—the needy and vulnerable. Not just love in action, but faith and hope in action too. Such behaviour doesn't come from nowhere, nor does it come from ourselves. It comes from God; it is fed and nurtured by God. It is no accident that it is on Maundy Thursday evening, we sing 'Where there's love and loving kindness, God himself is there'. One of the verses of that hymn reads:

Here in Christ we gather, love of Christ our calling.
 Christ, our love, is with us, gladness be his greeting.
 Let us fear and love him, holy God eternal.
 Loving him, let each love Christ in one another.

Sarah joins me in sending
 the assurance of prayer
 for you and yours, every day



DAILY GOSPEL PASSAGES FOR July

These are the daily Gospels for the Eucharist, which you can make the centre of your daily prayer.

1 W	Matthew 8.23–27 <i>30th anniversary of Bp Jonathan's ordination as a priest</i>	16 T	Matthew 11.28–end
2 T	Matthew 9.1–8	17 F	Matthew 12.1–8
3 F	St Thomas: John 20.24–29	18 S	Matthew 12.14–21
4 S	Matthew 9.14–17	19 Sun	6th after Trinity: Matthew 13.24–30, 36–43
5 Sun	4th after Trinity: Matthew 11.16–19, 25–end	20 M	Matthew 12.38–42
6 M	Matthew 9.18–26	21 T	Matthew 12.46–end
7 T	Matthew 9.32–end	22 W	St Mary Magdalene: John 20.1–2, 11–18
8 W	Matthew 10.1–7	23 T	Matthew 13.10–17
9 T	Matthew 10.7–15	24 F	Matthew 13.18–23
10 F	Matthew 10.16–23	25 S	St James the Apostle: Matthew 20.20–28
11 S	St Benedict: Matthew 10.24–33	26 Sun	7th after Trinity: Matthew 13.31–33, 44–52
12 Sun	5th after Trinity: Matthew 13.1–9, 18–23	27 M	Matthew 13.24–35, or 31–35
13 M	Matthew 10.34–11.1	28 T	Matthew 13.36–43
14 T	John Keble: Matthew 11.20–24	29 W	Mary, Martha and Lazarus: Matthew 13.44–46
15 W	St Bonaventure: Matthew 11.25–27	30 T	Matthew 13.47–53
		31 F	St Ignatius Loyola: Matthew 13.54–end