



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Easter 5 (The Fourth Sunday after Easter)
Holy Communion

8.30am

Readings:

The First Epistle of St James 1.17
The Holy Gospel according to St John 16.5

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

I think one of the moments when I first started to ‘get’ the Book of Common Prayer was when I worshipped for a while in the university holidays at a little medieval country Prayer Book parish, long since gobbled up by the South London suburban sprawl.

It struck me suddenly at a midweek Mass: the powerful grounding of the rites of the Prayer Book within the life and rhythm of communities living from Spring to winter, the Saints Days, the Paschal Mystery woven inseparably with our life and death, sickness and unseasonable weather, gossip and relationships. The ‘whole’ness of it struck me like a particularly big edition of the Prayer Book smacking one in the face.

Partly I suppose it struck me because that reality was so very far from my own. The seasons and sickness have been tamed, our communities stretch wirelessly across the world, but strangely skip the person who lives next door. There is no glut and famine in the Harvest cycle, no local rejoicing on our Saints Days – because Saint Tesco’s day is everyday of the year and her shelves are always stocked.

You’ll already seen where I am going...Not any more you say.

It has taken a lethal pandemic for us to see some of this more clearly. Here in St Marylebone and all over the country we have seen the boughs of charity blossom, the cultivation of new gratitude, neighbours caring, people really appreciating the food we have – as simple and homely as it may be.

The air our children breathe is cleaner, we have decided to notice the poor, and to *do something* about homelessness.

We haven't yet 'Jerusalem builded here', but (ironically) in the words of St Tesco – 'every little helps'.

One excellent American Dominican theologian has written recently:

'Christians ought to treat this pandemic as an opportunity to learn more about God. What does it mean that God has permitted (or willed) temporary conditions in which our elite lifestyle of international travel is grounded, our consumption is cut to a minimum, our days are occupied with basic responsibilities toward our families and immediate communities, our resources and economic hopes are reduced, and we are made more dependent upon one another? What does it mean that our nation-states suddenly seem less potent and our armies are infected by an invisible contagion they cannot eradicate, and that the most technologically advanced countries face the humility of their limits? Our powerful economies are suddenly enfeebled, and our future more uncertain. Priests and bishops are confronted with a new obligation to seek interiority over activism as their sacramental ministry is rendered less potent, and laypeople have to find God outside the sacraments in their own interior lives, discovering new ways to be grateful for what they have rather than disdainful in the face of what they lack. We might think none of this tells us anything about ourselves, or about God's compassion and justice. But if we simply seek to pass through all this in hasty expectation of a return to normal, perhaps we are missing the fundamental point of the exercise.'¹

Challenging stuff, I'm sure you'll agree.

St James (ever the practical theologian) has it right in today's epistle:

'Every good gift comes from above'. Gratitude and responsibility. Attentiveness to what God is nudging us to see.

'Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath'.

We are called to bravely and faith-fully open our ears and eyes (and leave our mouths shut). Because it is only with our eyes and ears radically open that we will hear the whisper of the *Comforter's* voice. Jesus makes it clear: God is not absent, God is not silent. God is bringing about in creation the fruits of the Resurrection. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is at large and is

¹ 'Epidemic Danger and Catholic Sacraments' by Fr Thomas Joseph White published 9th April 2020
[\[https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/04/epidemic-danger-and-catholic-sacraments\]](https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/04/epidemic-danger-and-catholic-sacraments)

leading us *forward* into all truth. Towards the ‘abundance’ of life that Jesus came to bring – ‘every good gift’. ‘Let every man be swift to hear’.