



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Healing Mass 18th March 2020

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters, these are strange times indeed. London feels like a ghost town; we are isolated from one another, many are ill, many are anxious.

Many are prevented from receiving the eucharist as a result of these unprecedented times. We are in a kind of exile.

And as we share the offering of this eucharist today, we remember a saint of the church, St Cyril Bishop of Jerusalem, and teacher of the faith, who spent 16 years of his life in exile. Cyril often came into conflict with authority in heated disagreements with other bishops and emperors, and was banished a number of times. His disagreements were about the nature of Christian truth and the person of Jesus and he was ultimately proved right. He was a pastoral bishop who carefully taught those preparing for baptism, and cared for the vulnerable – one of his exiles was as a result of selling church property to help the poor during a time of drastic food shortage in Jerusalem.

There is so much loss around at the moment; loss of health, sadly, loss of life. Loss of all those events and gatherings, meetings and services that have had to be cancelled. A feared loss of income and employment for many. Like those who came before us we must hunker down, make do and mend, and show the kind of blitz spirit that Londoners showed during the last war.

Despite all this loss, as Christians, we know and trust that God can always bring good out of evil and distressing circumstances: that after all is what the story of Holy Week and Easter is all about. Maybe there actually might be some good things that come out of this strange and sad time. Many within our community, individuals, churches and businesses are reaching out to others to offer help and support. And the effect on the environment has, apparently, been very significant.

Planet earth is having a holiday from the reduction consumption of our fossil fuels. The lockdown of factories in Hubei province in China has meant that the number of good quality air days increased by 21% in February. Fish have returned to the canals of Venice now the water is emptier and cleaner. Nazanin Ratcliffe has been temporarily released from prison. As we have to fast from public church services, from touch, from the Eucharist, maybe we will approach those things when they return with a greater appreciation, sensitivity, joy. As Joni Mitchell once sang You don't know what you got till its gone. Much beauty, creativity, scholarship and prayer has come out of times of exile and privation.

Did you know for example that the second part of the Hail Mary prayer arose from a time similar to what we are facing now?

The first part was known as the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin and consisted of the words of both the Angel Gabriel's and Elizabeth's greeting to Mary. But during the Black Plague, also known as the Black Death which ravaged throughout Europe, the final words were added 'Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.'

May the prayers of all the Saints, St Cyril and our Blessed Lady be with us and protect us. And may we discover that walking in the way of the cross, we may find it none other than the way of life and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.