

A Pastoral Letter to the Students of Nashotah House
Holy Week 2020

Dear all,

What follows is a pastoral letter to give you an update on what to expect during Holy Week and also to provide some help and guidance in the strangest Holy Week any of us have known (and, God-willing, the stringiest we *will* know in our lifetimes).

I know all of us are grieving at this strange and frankly bewildering reality of being unable to go to our churches (and to our community chapel). It may surprise you to know that it is similarly strange and painful for the priests, though for slightly different reasons. While there is some consolation in being able to celebrate and receive, it is balanced against the deprivation of the People of God from the Manna of the Mysteries. It is painful not to have the ecclesial Body of Christ visible as we celebrate the sacrament Body. Of course, the Eucharist is not the whole of the spiritual life, and this time forces, better, *calls* us to lean into those places and seek them with greater urgency.

The recent pastoral letter of the Bishop of Chichester to his clergy has really resonated with me and provided a biblical way to look at this time (with recourse to the Prayer Book tradition). I've reproduced part of it, so that you can meditate on it as well (and you can read the whole letter [here](#)).

I want to encourage all of you to decide now that you will engage in all the ways that are possible. The Office, in particular, will center us in Sacred Scripture and fix our eyes upon Jesus, and on Him alone, mediated through the whole sweep of the Bible. I urge you: pray Morning and Evening Prayer every day next week.

While it may seem strange to have these services (maybe the Vigil, especially) when no one can be there, I think there is another way to look at this. The Exultet proclaims in inimitable poetry the whole sweep of God's saving history and brings the Jewish "This is the night..." into Christological focus. Even if few are there to hear it, we will nonetheless proclaim to all of creation—nay, to the principalities and powers who attempt to corrupt and destroy the creatures of God—that *this* is the night when our Mighty King is victorious; when darkness is vanquished; when Our Lord delivered up his faithful people; when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell; that, to redeem a slave, the Father gave us his Son. This is the night when innocence is restored to the fallen and joy is brought to those who mourn, who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. This is the night when earth and heaven are joined and mortals are reconciled to God.

In defiance of all the fear and anxiety, and even in defiance of being kept from our churches, we can spiritually unite ourselves to these sacred rites in these most holiest of days (whether or not you join in the live-stream). And in doing so, we can know the Lord, perhaps as we have never known Him. All the effects of this virus give us a picture of everything from which God came to save us: estrangement; fear; discord; separation; death and the fear of death.

Let me end with these words from 2 Corinthians 5:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶ So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Warmly,
Fr. Olver

An excerpt from the Letter of the Bishop of Chichester

The dispensation to celebrate the Eucharist without a congregation can seem generally foreign to the Church of England's tradition. What are we to make of it? How are we to do it?

There is perhaps some guidance from the book of Exodus, when the children of Israel are going through their desert experience. This resonates with this season of Lent. It is also a model for our life as a pilgrim people, journeying together in "darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1.79), with our sights fixed on Jesus Christ, the source of light and peace.

In the provisional dispensation of this pilgrimage, we read that "Whenever Moses went out to the tent [of meeting], all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of their tents and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent" (Exodus 33.8).

There are further details of the rituals of this meeting and the role that both Moses and Aaron are given. These two Old Testament figures were foundational for the Church of England self-understanding of itself in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. They feature in the title page of prayer books and the King James Version of the Bible; they are prominent in the decoration of many churches in this period.

The focus of the ordained minister interceding for the people in ritual is well-established in the Church of England's imagination, though it is now overlaid by other important considerations of the nature of the Church and the active participation of the whole people in worship.

When an incumbent is inducted, the ritual of going to the church door, tolling the bell and being placed in a stall all have meaning. The priest is the doorkeeper (just as Jesus describes himself as the Door of the sheepfold). The bell is the indication of proclamation, witness to the Church's activity of prayer, and the stall is the study desk of scripture, liturgy and meditation. These distinctively Church of England rituals are indicative of a profound sense of the church as temple, a building that expresses in its sacred geometry a material delineation of the body of Christ.

It is important, however, that we draw from our scriptural and ecclesial tradition in order to make arrangements that will meet the provisional limitations which are likely to be with us for some time.

Moses, and on other occasions, Aaron, go into the tent alone, in order to pray for the people. But the people are not passive. They go to the door of their dwellings as witnesses to this work. They stand in the presence of God with them: they watch, and they pray.

This dispersed work of prayer is also the work of Christian laity. It is what we are now being asked to nurture in their lives, as well as our own, of as we emphasize and celebrate the link between the corporate worship of Church and the domestic worship of home. In each home, for example:

- the chair in which you sit to read the Bible is the domestic lectern where together we hear read what the daily scriptures are saying to us.
- your front window is the pulpit where the mystery of Christ in your life can be articulated.

- your meal table is the place where you give thanks for creation, for the food by which God sustains your life, and for the mystery of Christ who is present to us in this same manner as the food of the Eucharist. (Grace at times of meals could reference this more carefully.)

The role of the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist is to bear all this to the altar in church through the rites of word and sacrament that unite earth with heaven and thereby give glory to God the Father.

The celebration of the Eucharist without a congregation should heighten our awareness that this act does not belong to the priest.

The celebrant of every Eucharist is Jesus Christ, the new Moses. The gifts on the altar are the manifestation of the life of the people of the new Israel, the Church, in their daily working life, and in prayer and worship in their homes. Jesus unites these gifts with the offering of himself to God for the salvation of the world.