



THE BISHOP OF EBBSFLEET

Hill House, The Mount, Caversham  
READING RG4 7RE

**From the Bishop of Ebbsfleet  
to all parishes under his oversight**

PASTORAL LETTER

*Concerning Public Worship and the Celebration of the Sacraments  
in relation to the current international pandemic*

20 March 2020

*St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne*

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord

In three short weeks, here and in many places around the world, life has been radically changed. Our daily patterns of life and work are being changed to protect the greater good; the institutions and services of our common life are under unprecedented pressure; and the lives of the world's most vulnerable—the elderly, the poor, the homeless and those with health conditions—are threatened. Little surprise then that the Church should find itself deeply affected, and having no choice but to find new and untried ways of living through this time and looking to the future.

I am sure that you will all recognize the wisdom of Her Majesty The Queen's appeal yesterday that as a society we should come together 'to work as one', concentrating our combined efforts, focusing on our common goal. 'We *all* have a vitally important part to play', she said 'as *individuals*.' Paradoxically, at a time when our individual lives are being pushed *apart* by the absolute necessity to maintain universal good hygiene and a safe physical distance from one another, we are discovering that only acting in a really *collaborative* way will have the impact that we all need. We are all being taught by this experience to recalibrate the connections between our individuality and our community, between being one and being many – whether as people, as families and as nations.

Of all people on earth this should come as *least* surprise to the disciples of Jesus, whose profound sense of calling and responsibility as the Son of God was entirely shaped by the love of his Father and the salvation of his brothers and sisters. So Christians can recognize in our present crisis not just that human generosity which appears in times of danger and trial, but the *reality* of what it means to be human, and to be created in the likeness of God. To be human is to be one *and* many.

And that should remind us Christians of a *second reality*: that *our* life together as Christ's Body is not for the sake of ourselves but for the life of the world. If in these coming months the Church has to experience being forcibly pulled away from the consolations of our routine life and worship—forced for the first time that any of us can remember, into a kind of collective eucharistic fast—it may be so that we can rediscover the mission God has given us: to be real witnesses in *this* world—currently so fearful and anxious—of the joy and peace of the *world to come*, God's kingdom.

Plainly none of this will happen if we do not use the time that we now have on our hands to learn afresh how to pray. Not just prayers for all the different ways in which people are caught up in the present crisis; but prayers that turn our hearts toward God. The Psalms frequently exhort us to praise God's mighty power and his loving intimacy. We may have to be physically distant from one another, but God is *not* distant. 'He is', says St Augustine, 'nearer to us than our innermost parts'. (*Confessions* 3.6.11)

In recent days, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, together with the bishops, have implemented changes in how we must practice our faith for the coming months. I too have written to all the clergy of parishes under my oversight setting out the necessary changes that need to take effect in the pastoral and liturgical ministries we share. Your parish priest can provide you with copies of the archbishops' letter and mine. I ask every worshipper to embrace these arrangements. They will be kept under review in the light of expert health and hygiene advice.

Of course the most dramatic change is the suspension of all public acts of worship, and thus the lack of access to celebrations of the Eucharist. All clergy and lay officers will however strive to keep our churches open wherever possible so that, especially on Sunday mornings, those who wish to can visit to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. I do not underestimate what a loss this will be to you all. Nonetheless the clergy have been encouraged to celebrate the Eucharist and to pray Morning and Evening Prayer, in church without a congregation. Some churches will make arrangements for live-streaming of these acts of worship to support the laity: I hope to do so myself. But above all I encourage you to keep Sunday carefully as the Lord's Day, to read slowly and prayerfully the readings for that day's Mass; to pray the Rosary, the Litany, the Jesus Prayer; to prepare in your home a shrine or prayer station, with a crucifix and images of the Lord and the saints; and to expressing to the Lord in prayer your desire to receive Holy Communion even while you can't; desiring to be united to him, and filled with his Holy Spirit. It will be a blessed and joyful day, when we can assemble again to celebrate Mass together!

Thank you for everything you will do to support your parish, and its wider community in the coming months. Please show a special care and concern for anyone who might struggle. And do not be afraid to ask for prayerful support yourself. Shop responsibly; be generous to charities helping the most vulnerable; encourage your families as often as you can with words of faith and hope; pray for those afflicted by the virus; and those who risk their lives to help them.

Two prayers for you to use at home before Passiontide begins:

Almighty God, it is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power, and by your outstretched arm. Nothing is beyond your power. We turn to you in our need, to ask your protection against coronavirus which has claimed lives and affected many. We pray for those afflicted. May they soon be restored to health. Grant this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us, through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Collect for the Third Sunday after Epiphany*

With love and every blessing:

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "+ Jonathan Goodall" in a cursive script. The plus sign is at the beginning, followed by the name "Jonathan" and "Goodall" written in a fluid, connected hand.

The Right Reverend Jonathan Goodall