

Dear all

In many of my phone calls recently I have been asked about when the church might re-open. Thanks to all for your patience and understanding. We will open as soon as we can safely do so.

This morning we received a letter from our bishops, which sums up the problems and frustrations in the first 2 paragraphs:

We realise that many of you will be incredibly frustrated at the way announcements about the possible opening of churches for private prayer have been handled over the last few days, not least what appears to have been the moving of the date yesterday for any potential reopening from Monday 15th June to Saturday 13th June. We share your frustration.

We are still waiting for clear government guidance on what this actually means in detail, especially with respect to whether churches are to be required to be 'supervised' while they are open. We hope that we will receive that guidance later today, and that this will enable us to provide clear advice and support to assist in your own local decision making by the end of tomorrow, Friday.

We will let you know as soon as we have definite information and guidelines. In the meantime, the PCC have already considered some ways that we might be able to manage an opening. Watch this space!

Today is a feast day for the church that, under the current restrictions, is rather poignant for many. It is the Feast of Corpus Christi. The Feast of Corpus Christi (Dies Sanctissimi Corporis et Sanguinis Domini Iesu Christi, literally 'Day of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ the Lord'), also known as the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, is a Catholic liturgical solemnity celebrating the Real Presence of the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ in the elements of the Eucharist. It was proposed by St. Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian, to Pope Urban IV, in order to create a feast focused solely on the Holy Eucharist. Two months earlier, the institution of the Eucharist is celebrated on Maundy Thursday, however it is a more sombre occasion as it ends with the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal and trial of Jesus, followed by his death. It also commemorates the washing of the disciples feet. Corpus Christi emphasises the joy of the Eucharist.

Pope Urban IV established the feast of Corpus Christi as a Solemnity in 1264. In England it was celebrated by processions, carrying the consecrated bread in a monstrance round the parish, by plays and by feasting. The reformed Church of England banned its celebration in 1548 but it now appears in the church calendar as a 'festival' (as compared to a 'principal feast' or a 'lesser festival'), and is more correctly titled *Day of Thanksgiving for Holy Communion*. The degree to which it is celebrated would depend on how catholic the spirituality of each individual church is – the more Anglo-Catholic being almost indistinguishable from Roman Catholic practice.

It is strange how such a central and important practice – a 'dominical' sacrament, i.e. one commanded by our Lord himself ("Do this in remembrance of me") – could be so divisive, but it was ever thus. Even today, Anglicans and Roman Catholics cannot share Communion/Eucharist/Mass together (the range of names illustrating different nuances of belief). In the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, sincere believers of all traditions were burnt at the stake for their beliefs. And even in Jesus' time, many, perhaps most, of his followers fell away after his teachings about "I am the bread of life. He who eats my flesh... drinks my blood..." (John chapter 6).

We have perhaps become inured to the terms used – every communion service I refer to the wafer as the 'body of Christ', and we are used to that. It has lost its bite. Perhaps if we translated the Feast 'Corpus

Christi' as the 'corpse of Christ' we might regain some of the shock value of the teaching, and ask ourselves some very interesting questions about what we are doing when we receive communion.

Here is a version of one of the most beautiful Corpus Christi hymns – Thee we adore, O hidden saviour

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONQ_4rI2KIU

And here the same in its original plainsong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xs67InkZ3A>

A hymn written by St Thomas Aquinas – Pange lingua

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnrOwiYqTcc>

There are many versions of Ave verum:

Plainsong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdyQQ8I2Pi4>

Byrd

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2ckGcpx6xl>

Mozart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbjCg1EKnb0>

Elgar, to name but 4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9H1JOAj_HU

And finally, O taste and see by Vaughan Williams (not quite Corpus Christi in the same way as the others)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heiiATCrwVQ>

Here is Nick Fawcett's most recent prayer:

We have kept ourselves safe, Lord,
so far, anyway,
and we rejoice in that,
we celebrate and give thanks for it,
but we would think also of those who have not been so fortunate;
those who, in different ways, have already been victims of this pandemic.
We remember especially those who have died,
often alone save for a nurse by their side.
We think of their loved ones,
reeling with shock,
numbed by grief,
struggling to come to terms with someone whom they treasured beyond words
suddenly and cruelly being plucked away from them.
We pray for those who are ill in hospital at this time,

facing their own battle against this disease,
enduring the fear,
the mental trauma,
the emotional anguish of knowing that they may not pull through.
We think of those who have recovered,
but whose health has been undermined by the virus,
perhaps never to be fully regained;
of those who are still haunted by their experience,
and of family members who have had to stand by helpless
while their loved one battles for their life –
no option other than to wait,
hope
and pray.
We have kept ourselves safe, Lord,
but, of course, this isn't just about us;
it's about others too:
those who have been left bruised,
battered,
broken,
bereft,
by everything they have faced.
Uphold them,
uplift them,
embrace them in your loving arms,
and may light shine for them again.
Amen.



Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark