

Dear Falls Church Family,

The extensive and lengthening impact of Covid-19 upon our lives weighs heavily. We not only feel its effect personally, but in our nation when combined with the injustices of racism we face in profound and blatant ways. I need God's strong and loving presence in Christ to be with me and work through me as I discern and pray how I turn from demonstration and protest to viable actions that make a difference.

This is a time in my life, and our life as God's people, I believe we need the Eucharist more than ever. But health and "love of neighbor" guidelines direct us to continue our fast from the Eucharist. Certainly, we receive God's presence in Christ in our regular worship service of the Word during Morning Prayer. However, I long for the breadth and depth of the hope-filled prayers and actions of the Eucharist that are not only shrouded in mystery, but encased in words of thanksgiving, oblation (offering), and of receiving a certain and undeniable grace as pure gift from God. We have not heard these words nor participated in these actions since early March. As your Rector, I believe it is time we pray these words and actions.

Many Episcopal Churches are including Spiritual Communion to help fill the void we may be experiencing. Spiritual communion is a personal devotional that anyone can pray at any time to express their desire to receive Holy Communion at that moment, but in which circumstances impede them from actually sharing the sacrament. It is a long-time practice of the church, especially when those who are sick could not participate physically. This coming Sunday, our service will include Spiritual Communion.

This is what will happen on Sunday:

- Our service will follow the order for the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist, Rite Two.
- After the Offertory Anthem the Eucharistic prayers will be offered over bread and wine at the altar of the Historic Church to draw us into the rhythm and mystery of the Eucharist.
- During the Offertory, and during the Eucharistic prayer, we are asked to offer our life to God. We normally do this when we worship by making monetary offerings and offering bread and wine, all which are tangible expressions of our lives.
- This Sunday, during the Offertory Anthem and during the Eucharistic Prayer that follows, offer your life to God in whatever way you can. You may have some bread and wine with you or not. But if you desire, offer bread and wine (or fruit juice) to God as an expression of your life and labor. You may want to make a monetary gift. However you do it, please prayerfully make an offering of your life to God!
- As you hear and reflect upon the Eucharistic Prayer praying with the Celebrant, know that God is receiving your gift and will return life to you in blessing and grace in whatever way God needs to do that for you.
- We will pray the Prayer of Spiritual Communion (from St. Alphonsus Liguori, d. 1787) and you will have a few moments "to commune."
- We will then say a prayer of thanksgiving appropriate to Spiritual Communion.
- And finally, we will be sent out into the world in blessing as the Body of Christ, nourished spiritually by Christ's presence.

**Now, to be clear, this is NOT the Eucharist as we celebrate it on Sunday.** If you offer bread and wine at the Offertory representing an offering of your life, the bread and wine are not consecrated as they would be in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. But, acknowledging God is present to us in many ways, Christ will be present with you however you need that presence, care, and grace now. The bread and wine blessed at the altar on Sunday will not be consumed, but returned reverently to the earth as I acknowledge that since you cannot receive the specific sacrament of the Eucharist, neither shall I.

A Theological Reflection: You may have learned in your Confirmation class that a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The Church declares seven particular

sacraments including the Eucharist. But we are learning that God's spiritual grace is always larger than our senses behold. God is sacramentally present for us in countless ways. Theologian Tad Guzzie gives an updated definition of a sacrament: *A sacrament is a symbol of God's care for us in creation. Enacting the symbol draws us close to God who is always and ever present for us.* Any act of care we receive from God flowing through others in creation is a sacrament of God's grace that strengthens and supports our lives. Hearing God's word read and preached becomes a sacramental moment of God's presence and care. Our prayers for each other likewise. Every meal offered and shared in love is a sacrament. St. Francis would say that even the creatures of God's world and creation itself is a sacrament of God's care and grace for us.

**And so dear friends, may you know Christ in deeper ways as we seek to be his body at The Falls Church Episcopal.**