

Aloha Mai Kakou:

Anglicans/Episcopalians across the world are experiencing an unexpected and unfortunate fast from the Eucharist in the wake of the novel coronavirus COVID-19. In many ways, the inability of many to receive holy Communion has become an unimaginable Lenten discipline.

Episcopalians in recent days, as in countries across the world, have seen their bishops suspending the public celebration of holy Mass in the hope of helping to prevent the spread of the virus by practicing “social distancing.”

How are we Anglicans/Episcopalians to make sense of this temporary absence of public worship and the inability to regularly receive the body and blood of our Lord?

It might be helpful to take a brief look at other regular Anglican practices and then consider ways to make the best of the situation given the present obstacles.

First, it should be said that not all Episcopalians receive holy Communion at Mass. For example, Episcopalians are obliged to refrain from reception of holy Communion when in the state of sin, or of not loving their neighbor (BCP pg.316-7). Homebound Episcopalians are often unable to receive the Eucharist as frequently as they would like, as are others, by virtue of their distance from church, or even their proximity to civil unrest or war.

Second, remember that weekly reception of holy Communion was not regular practice in the Episcopal Church until recently. For many years, the main service of worship on Sunday was Morning Prayer. In fact, Episcopalians are “obligated” to receive holy Communion only three times a year to be in “good standing,” with at least one of those to occur during the Easter season. Only since 1979 has Holy Eucharist has been the principle act of Christian worship on Sunday (BCP pg13).

Because every baptized person is a member of Christ’s body, every time Christ is offered in the Eucharist, the *entire Church* is mystically present and offered to the Father. This means that, despite the current lack of the physical presence of the congregation, the celebration of the Mass continues

to be an offering of the eucharistic sacrifice for our own good and the good of the world.

Because of our need to be socially distant in this era of COVID19, and the blessing of technology that permits us to be together virtually, many bishops and priests, and even the pope, are offering live-streams of their daily Masses for the benefit of the faithful. St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), the archbishop of Milan, did much the same thing when, during an outbreak of the plague, he ordered the celebration of the Mass to take place outdoors, so people could watch from their homes. This became known as “Spiritual Communion.”

Spiritual Communion is a traditional practice of expressing to the Lord our longing for him and our desire for him to enter our hearts. St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) said: “When you do not receive Holy communion, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you.”

St. Jean-Marie Vianney (1786-1859), the famous country priest from Ars, France, once said “When we cannot go to the church, let us turn towards the tabernacle; for no wall can shut us out from the good God.”

How might we go about making a spiritual Communion? In pretty much the same way as receiving sacramental communion.

First, prepare yourself by having a desire to be united to Jesus Christ by acknowledging the need you have for Him; acknowledge and repent of your sins, past and present, ask Him to give you the grace to live entirely for Him, and finally offer a thanksgiving for your creation, preservation all the blessings of this life.

While there is no specific prayer prescribed by the Church to make an act of spiritual communion, one of the more popular prayers of spiritual communion comes from St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787). We used this prayer on Easter Sunday:

“My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my

heart. I embrace You as if You were already there, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.”

While we may consider the practice of “spiritual communion” as an alternative until such time as we can gather together again in person, we can also unite ourselves with Christ more closely through reading, studying, praying and discussing the Scriptures. Consider the daily readings offered in the Lectionary. Practice the meditative, reflective “lectio divina” method of praying with the word of God. Encounter the Lord through the psalms and prayers of the Daily Office (Morning/Evening Prayer, Compline), which in a complementary way, call forth the various devotions of the People of God.

Although we long for the time when we can once again greet one another with hugs and kisses, when we can together share in the mystical supper of our Lord in a sacramental sense, it bears remembering that while we are not gathered together in person at Church of the Holy Apostles, Jesus is not just sitting there waiting for us to come back and visit! He is *here with us, wherever we are*: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18: 20). And I believe He means virtual gatherings as well!

Be safe, Dear Ones, and remember all the people who love you.

Me ke aloha,

David+