

Dear Friends,

You never miss the water till the well runs dry

It is often said that you don't know the value of something until you miss it. There will be many things that each of us miss doing and hopefully will value all the more when they are returned to us.

One of the most significant must be ordinary social interaction: being able to pop in to say 'hi', meet someone in passing or at a usual time and place; celebrate with friends and relatives. It has been particularly difficult pastorally for the clergy when so much of what we do each day involves face to face contact. I know many of you will identify with the frustration of being unable to see someone - that is, to be physically present - when they are needy, lonely and upset and our instinct is to offer comfort and support.

We are all finding new ways of doing these things and I am grateful to see the neighbourliness, thoughtfulness, sensitivity and practical care that is taking place street by street and through our community. Many of our school staff have volunteered to support the children of health care workers and a number of people have adopted elderly members of our local communities providing essential food parcels. I have been particularly heartened to see a table in our locality with donations of food stuffs for folks in need to help themselves. I know, too, that many of you are sharing lovely stories on the school media about how you are making a difference for good where you live.

Praying and being at Home

The Christian tradition is rich with wisdom. Often it is ignored by society: we prefer to look elsewhere for help and guidance. Yet these days, people have been waking up to the fact that Christian religious communities have something to say to us; have a deep wisdom that can be shared. In one of these Anglican religious communities, one nun put it like this: "We sisters have been practising social distancing for years."

She offers some advice.

1. **Establish a routine.** We need this kind of stability as we enter each day. In religious communities, this pattern involves time for prayer and worship; eating; studying; working/exercising; and importantly, fun. A peaceful rhythm to each and every day.
2. **Reach out in love to others.** In times of uncertainty it is easy to get caught up in making sure your loved ones are ok and your needs are met. She encourages us to reach out beyond our immediate circle to neighbours and others who are in need.

3. **Get to know and learn to enjoy the company of those you are with:** families, friends, housemates, yourselves. Don't hide from them, under the guise that work needs to be done. This is an opportunity to strengthen bonds of family and friendship by spending quality time together – not least on the telephone.
4. **Take some time out to be quiet** – even if you are on your own. She describes how people say they want peace and quiet. Then, when it is thrown into their lap, they panic. They don't know how to be alone. They are afraid to confront their 'shadow side', the hard truths about themselves that they don't like. In that silence, we might learn to hear the voice of God who loves, affirms, accepts and forgives us.

Church Services

The live streaming of worship nationally and locally has received a great deal of appreciation with an astonishing number of people viewing it and listening to the podcasts. It has become part and parcel of the pattern of their day.

Our online staff prayer group continues to be a source of encouragement and blessing for many people – not least in continuing the fellowship of the church. If you would like us to pray for yourself or a loved one, do drop me a message HutchA@solsch.org.uk and we will incorporate those names into our prayer meetings on Wednesdays and Sundays of each week. I shall also continue to remember these people at Morning and Evening Prayer each day.

Holy Week

This Sunday is Palm Sunday, the beginning of the holiest week of the year for Christians. This year it will feel very strange indeed as we make our journey to the Cross and to Easter.

The rites of Holy Week seem to demand communal celebrations – the Palm Procession, the Washing of the Feet, the Vigil in the Garden of Repose, the devotions at the Cross, the joyful proclamation of Alleluia on Easter day.

All this we will have to forego this year, but hopefully we shall all participate as best we can in the live streaming of services from various sources and by the careful keeping of this Holy Week in our homes. There are, indeed, a few ways in which we can all enter into the drama of the week.

On Palm Sunday, why not decorate your front door with some greenery? Join with your family enacting the reading of the Palm Sunday story in the garden; process into your home and share stories and prayers.

The Maundy Thursday liturgy of the Last Supper gives us the opportunity to

use the resource I posted last week for an evening Agape meal. Give thanks to God for what the gift of the Eucharist means to you. Have a bell handy to ring. Light a candle in the darkness and spend some time with Christ as He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest.

On Good Friday, have a cross or crucifix nearby and say a prayer (one is added at the end of this letter) as you thank God for His love in Christ who died for us. Why not make some hot cross buns – or even have them delivered to your home (if you've miraculously managed to get a slot!)

And on Easter Day, have a bell handy to ring and when the priest says 'Christ is risen, Alleluia', startle your neighbours by shouting the response: 'He is risen indeed. Alleluia.'

You are all very much in our daily thoughts and prayers.
May you have a blessed and spiritually fruitful Holy Week and a Joy-filled Easter.

With every good wish and blessing
Father Andrew