

A Convocation Companion

Prayers for
Days of Isolation

Spring 2020



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The Convocation of **Episcopal** Churches in Europe

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Opening Sentences

Sweet hours have perished here;
This is a mighty room;
Within its precincts hopes have played, —
Now shadows in the tomb.

The poet Emily Dickinson was famously reclusive, and by her early thirties had withdrawn to a near-secluded existence in her room at The Homestead, the Dickinson family home—and the place where she had been born—in Amherst, Massachusetts. She is in some ways emblematic of the contemplative writer isolated from the world, maintaining social contact entirely through correspondence—and expressing her inner life in the words of poetry unseen by anyone until after her death. While the words of the epigraph above were not, we think, written specifically of the single room in which she lived out the mature years of her life, it is indeed fair to characterize any small place where prayer is offered and the heart finds its expression in words as a “mighty room.”

Dickinson’s isolation was voluntary. Ours is not—not by any means. This unwelcome and unhappy season of pandemic has taken away much from us; but the loss most keenly felt for many of us is the simple, pleasant joy of social contact. For those of us in the church, who make a practice of gathering in community at least once a week, it is especially difficult to know our gathering-places are empty, and we cannot reach them.

On the day that a thirty-day ban on travel into the European Union was announced—a span of time with no regard whatsoever for our annual passage from the penitence of Lent to the joys of Easter—I found myself particularly in

need of the support and encouragement of companions along this pilgrimage of faith. So I quickly wrote to a number of them with a simple request: Might we together create a series of reflections to share with everyone in our community of churches in Europe—even with the whole church—as a way of providing our isolated friends some sort of companionship for these days ahead?

The result is now on the screen before you, in the form of *A Convocation Companion*. It was assembled in great haste, by a willing, eager, and inspired group of volunteers, each of whom, as it turns out, is occupying their own mighty room. It is offered to you chiefly for the purpose of assuring you, and all of us—maybe especially me—that although we must be socially distant from each other, we can still be faithfully proximate, bound together in prayer for each other and for the world’s deliverance from this time of fear and disconnection.

As it is set before you, it is not a seasonal reader for the days of Lent; it is rather a companion for all of us for these thirty days of being cut off from the world and, in some sense, from each other. The authors have all responded to a very simple prompt—to read through the lessons appointed for the Daily Office of each of these days, and offer a short reflection on a specific verse that spoke to them. They have done so with prayerful elegance, and I take this opportunity formally to express to them my deep gratitude for keeping me company. I hope you find companionship for these days in their words, too.

Mark D. W. Edington
The Feast of Thomas Cranmer, 2020

John 6:35: “Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

In the tradition of the English church, the fourth Sunday in Lent had two identities: “Refreshment Sunday” and “Mothering Sunday.” It was near the midpoint of the season of self-denial and fasting; on this day, the disciplines were lightened a little. You could get out the butter again, to use a little bit making a [simnel cake](#); if you had struck out on your own, you were expected to return home to visit your mother.

The church hinted a little about the joy to come in the text from Isaiah (66:10) that was traditionally sung as the introit for this day; for that reason, drawing on the text of the Vulgate bible, this was also known as “Lætare Sunday” (“Lætare Jerusalem: et conventum facite omnes qui diligitis eam...” / “Rejoice, Jerusalem, and come together all who love her...”).

It is poignant to recall all this on the very first Sunday of a season we are denied the ability to gather together. It is painful to feel distanced from each other, and from sharing together in the sacrament of “the memorial thy Son hath commanded us to make”—the gathering of all disciples around the table of the Eucharistic feast.

Today I will be setting before God in prayer the longing I feel to be back in community with my sisters and brothers in faith. I will recognize within that longing the depth of the gift that we have all been given in our deep sense of fellowship and connection with each other, the circles of community that make up our friends, our fellowship groups, our congregations, and our remarkable community of communities. And I will pray that the creativity and skill with which we have been abundantly blessed will encourage us to find new ways of connecting, branching out, being in touch—and sharing, albeit in different ways, the communion Christ calls us to.

Lord Christ, you are known to us in the breaking of the bread; reveal yourself to us as well in our quiet, in our solitude, and in our hopes.

—Mark Edington is the bishop-in-charge of the Convocation.

1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God."

Paul was very concerned about community, and the Christian community in Corinth clearly needed his guidance. Food and drink had become divisive. Some would not partake of food that had previously been sacrificed to idols because it was tainted; others didn't see the problem because after all, idols weren't real. But as a result, the Corinthian Christians were out of fellowship.

We have the same problem, but for a different reason. We want to join together for Holy Communion, but we are not able to. We want to share food and drink and conversation at coffee hour (often referred to as the eighth sacrament!), but we are not allowed to. And as our social contacts are limited, by edict or recommendation, we can't even meet one another in our homes for a meal and for fellowship. We cannot eat or drink together, even though we want to. And so, we must look for other ways of sharing our lives. We worship together, even when we are not in the same space with the help of technology, or simply by saying the same prayers at the same time. We study the Word together because scripture also feeds us, especially when, in the words of the Collect (Proper 28), we "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" those words. We reach out to one another by phone and Zoom and Skype to maintain community and to share in joys and sorrows. We can still be one body, even when we are not able to partake of the one bread.

Whatever we do, Paul reminds us, is to be done for the glory of God. "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ," he goes on to say. God's glory is most visible in Jesus Christ, "the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) And we make that glory visible and tangible when we imitate Christ and when we seek and serve Christ in all persons, even at a distance.

Almighty and living God, we thank you for sending us Jesus to be the bread of life and the true vine, may this spiritual food and drink nourish and strengthen us for your service.

—*Christopher Easthill is Rector
of the Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury, Wiesbaden.*

Psalm 97:3: "A fire goes before him, / And burns up his enemies round about."

In my 20s, I stayed away from the Episcopal Church, in which I had grown up. I gave a myriad of excuses that don't need to be mentioned here. One of the things that brought me back was the Episcopal way of reconciling how bad things can happen to good people. I take that into my own experience as, God gives us free will, even to be stupid. It's God's gift to us, to choose or not to choose to live into the liberating love that is here for all of us.

This verse in Psalm 97 would seem to contradict that. The psalm is about God's coming and supreme reign. It says clouds and darkness are around him, it says mountains melt like wax before him. This is a God who fights our battles for us, if in rather violent fashion. At the end, God delivers us out of the hands of the wicked.

By that argument, we should be expecting divine help with the coronavirus. And yet in many of our countries, we have poor leadership and insufficient action. We have citizens choosing to violate social-distancing rules and others, in the U.S. at least, still denying there is a problem at all.

As I struggled to reconcile this, a thought came to me: Jesus is with you. The Way of Love, Jesus' way, can burn up the frustration we feel confined in our residences, can melt the mountains of fear in our hearts, can lift the darkness that keeps us from checking on an elderly neighbor. Jesus is with us in this lockdown, as we "attend" online services and as we try to keep loving and praying.

Dear Lord: Help us to follow your way through this time of trouble. Amen

*—Anne Swardson is a parishioner of
the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, Paris.*

Isaiah 52:8: "Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion."

Except in the rarest of cases, the "baby bump" is one of the most visible signs humans have to show that new life is en route. Just days ago, I visited my best friend in the US who has just made it safely to her first trimester mark and I have never felt anything like the sensation of resting my hand on her changed belly. This news has inspired much singing amid all this stress because our joy is now in plain sight: there's nothing but changed life ahead for all who surround her family.

Our tradition celebrates the place of real human bodies in the Greatest Story of All; how blessed are we all for the gift that was knit together and emerged from one young woman's consenting body. We have said (at least since the year 692) that today is one of the only festival celebrations that can supersede all the solemnity of the season of Lent. You can fast, you can pray, you can give alms—but I exhort you: the holiest of all ways to keep your Lenten observance today is to join with the communion of saints in the joyful celebration of creation. Unstoppable, irresistible, long-awaited creation.

Today, we agree! Let it be unto us, too, Lord!

But this isn't just a day to celebrate human creation. One of the most beautiful effects of restricted movement in Italy is the resurgence of all life. Birdsong is, for now, heard more frequently on our street than car or motorbike engines. In Venice, the canals run clearer than usual and the fish are visibly returning to their habitats. Pots on our own terrace, where we join our neighbors in coordinated nights of song and candlelight, are filled with green again, inviting us to step outside and tend to them, notice them. In this forced solitude, I am renewing my prayers that we find our way to sing that we have seen that 'new heaven and new earth.' May turning toward our true life create more room for the least of these.

Our Brother Jesus, may we become as sentinels to those who cannot see your joy clearly now, and may you inspire a vision of your creativity and compassion so completely in us that its beauty and promise can be seen—even from afar.

*—Maleah Rios is the unofficial cheerleader
for the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe.*

Mark 8:33: "But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'"

I can't help wondering how Peter felt when Jesus said these words to him – after all, he'd only been expressing his fear and worries for Jesus, and then he is called "Satan" by the one he loves most of all! It is, after all, only natural to be afraid for ourselves and for those we love, and it is not a sinful thing to express this.

But what I think Jesus was rebuking Peter for is not the fact that he was fearful, but that he was letting this fear get in the way of showing love, and following the way that God wants us to follow. Peter, I imagine, was trying to dissuade Jesus from following his path, the way to the Cross. "It'll be dangerous, Rabbi... You never know what will happen... Better stay at home and think about yourself..."

And in these days, now, when we are confined to our homes, or facing that confinement in the very near future, those voices are whispering to us now. Stay home. Think about yourself. Buy that toilet roll...grab that hand sanitizer... snatch the last packet of rice... Feed the fear, the isolation, the selfishness

Most of us have no choice but to stay home, but we do have a choice about how we face our perfectly natural fears. We should not let our fear become more important than our trust in God: we do not know exactly what he will call us to do during this time, but he will – and does – call on us to trust him. To worship him. To hold tight to his hand and know that all things (finally) work together for good. We may not see it, but there is a plan. And finally some words from one of those "inspirational wallpapers": My fear doesn't stand a chance when I stand in your love. My fear only stands a chance if I forget who my God is: a God of love, of compassion, of strength. This is the God I worship.

We stand in God's love: and in these days of fear and selfishness he calls us to share this love in whatever way we can.

Lord, your love is the perfect love that casts out fear. In these uncertain times, give us the strength to trust you, showing through it all that our God is a God of love for all.

*—Alison Wale, a Lay Reader of the Church of England,
is a parishioner of Christ Church, Clermont-Ferrand.*

Mark 8:31–32a: “Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly.”

“We didn’t see this coming!” This is the response of many of us as we suddenly wake up to find that the coronavirus pandemic has actually arrived on our doorstep. Some weeks ago, we learned of a virus called Covid-19. We watched with a detached horror as coronavirus wreaked ravage in Wuhan, China. But we didn’t see it coming to us. Nor we did we foresee that the world as we know it with its economic swagger come crashing to a halt; the nonchalant freedoms we have enjoyed of socializing in pubs, going with family and friends to restaurants, dropping by the cinema to watch a movie – all these taken-for-granted freedoms taken from us in a twinkling of an eye.

In Saint Mark’s Gospel, Jesus begins to warn his closest followers that he is about to experience suffering and death. They don’t see it coming. A blind man from Bethsaida is healed. When Jesus looked at him intently, the man who had been blind ‘saw everything clearly’ (Mark 8:25). But the disciples don’t see clearly; don’t grasp what Jesus is telling them. When Jesus tells them even more explicitly that he is going to be killed (Mark 9:31), the evangelist remarks: “They did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him” (Mark 9:32).

In the face of calamity, Jesus invites us to see clearly; to foresee what’s coming. To journey with him on the path of sacrifice. To find in death the God-given hope of new life. But to do this with real depth; to see and grasp and understand – this requires us to glimpse the mystery of the crucified God. And we can only do that on our knees, touched by the healing hand of Christ who opens our eyes so that we see reality truly as it is. “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Lord Christ, you are known to us in the breaking of the bread; reveal yourself to us as well in our quiet, in our solitude, and in our hopes.

—*Michael Rusk is rector of Emmanuel Church, Geneva.*

Marc 9:22–23: « Le père a dit: «Si vous êtes capable de faire quoi que ce soit, ayez pitié de nous et aidez-nous.»... Jésus lui dit: « Si tu le peux! - Tout peut être fait pour celui qui croit.»

En ce temps incertain, beaucoup de monde nous diront: “Si vous pouvez faire quoi que ce soit, aidez-nous.” Et nous serons confrontés à des défis, non seulement pour la santé de la Terre entière, mais aussi pour les défis de la vie quotidienne: prenant soin de nous-mêmes et des autres; témoignant de l’espérance qui est en nous; prenant les précautions de bon sens conseillées par les experts en santé publique; encourageant les vulnérables et les craintifs. Mais nous Chrétiens, ne sommes-nous pas, nous aussi, experts - en santé spirituelle? Ne sommes-nous pas appelés à offrir une pastorale, une présence sacramentelle et une foi en notre Dieu aimant? Oui, nous sommes appelés, et pourtant nous nous sentons impuissants alors même que nous faisons de notre mieux pour nous-mêmes et pour ceux qui nous entourent. Au milieu de notre impuissance, dans nos sentiments de ne pas pouvoir être pleinement une force d’amour dans un monde effrayant, Jésus dit: «Si vous le pouvez? Bien sûr, vous le pouvez, car «tout peut être fait pour celui qui croit.» Alors, frères et sœurs, restons fermes dans notre confiance que Dieu peut tout faire, et que Jésus est présent, aimant et compatissant. en nous et parmi nous, alors que nous vivons les changements et les défis nouveaux et inattendus que nous rencontrons chaque jour. Croyons parce que «tout peut être fait pour celui qui croit».

Dieu saint, nous croyons; aide notre incrédulité. Marche avec nous sur le chemin de l’amour. Seigneur, écoute notre prière. Amen.

—*Mary Ellen Dolan is the Safeguarding Officer of the Convocation.*

Romans 12:12: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer."

I plucked this jewel from Paul's letters to the Romans because it really packs a punch. With depth and simplicity, it offers a wonderful tool to help us grow through life's challenges. No matter where we are on our journey, life clearly show us which lessons of love we need to learn at any given time. Whether forgiveness, patience, trust or compassion are on the agenda, none of us escape the big lessons. For me, in addition to these, life has always been about Joy: experiencing it, sharing it, helping others to feel it, and when it is lacking, trying to figure out how to create it. Hope is the fuel that propels us forward to catch up with Joy. These days, I rejoice in the hope of a more conscientious and connected world after the Corona virus has run its course - just like I rejoice in the thought of grandchildren (though my kids are still far too young, so there's no hurry!). Which leads me to Patience! Patience entails wisdom and the awareness of how little we actually control in our efforts to have things go according to our own will. The Buddhists say that desire is the source of all suffering. So when we are impatient, we need to check our desires. Regardless of our wishes, we have no idea how long this quarantine may last, so we can make the most of it by simply taking things day by day, doing what we can, wherever we are, with whatever we have. When my husband's non-stop "home office" conference calls drive me bonkers, I rejoice in the hope of escaping outdoors to pull weeds (a task to which I have a horrible aversion under normal circumstances). And when my hope and my patience wane, I take comfort and persevere in prayer, because with God all things are possible, and in God all things will be good and new once again.

Lord, thank you for always giving us hope, for helping us to find the patience which comforts us amid our suffering; help us to keep you close in our hearts and minds as we persevere through the challenges which help us grow during these uncertain days; and help us to persevere together so that we may all come out stronger, wiser, rejoicing, hopeful, more patient and even more loving than we were before.

Whether cloudy or clear skies, horizons offer hope
 Much depends on timing or expansion of the scope
 Pain is part of human life, lived with and for each other
 Our gifts were given to us so we'd care for one another

—*Kathleen Koch is a member of Emmanuel Church, Geneva.*

Psalm 31:22: "Dank sei dir, HERR! Du hast mir deine Güte erwiesen; ein Wunder hast du an mir getan, als meine Feinde mich ringsum bedrängten." (Aus der Gute Nachricht Bibel)

Psalm 31 ist eine starke ermutigen für uns, gerade in der jetzigen Zeit. Dieser Psalm ist gruppiert mit neun anderen Psalmen, die alle das Thema Vertrauen auf Gottes Güte gemeinsam haben. Der Psalm, geschrieben in einer Zeit der Krise, ist eine Mischung aus Klagen, Hilfeschrei, und zuversichtlichem Lobpreis, basiert auf der Treue Gottes in der Vergangenheit. Der Autor des Psalmes beschreibt Gott als eine Burg, ein sicheres Schloss, oder ein Fels bei dem er sich bergen kann, und zu dem er fliehen kann.

Vers 22 hat mich besonders angesprochen, weil der Autor in der Lage war, auch mitten im Angriff, Gott zu preisen, weil er sich daran erinnert hat, dass Gott in der Vergangenheit Treue gehalten hat. Im Hebräischen bedeutet das Wort Huld oder Güte soviel wie Gnade, zarte Fürsorge, Barmherzigkeit, und Zuverlässigkeit. Es ist eine innige Liebe verbunden mit Taten.

In der Gute Nachricht Bibel heisst es im Vers 22, dass Gott seine Güte zeigt, „wenn meine Feinde mich ringsum bedrängten.“ Das Volk ist umzingelt von Gefahr und Bedrohung und dennoch preisen sie Gott, weil sie wissen, dass Gott in der Vergangenheit treu war und auch in der Gegenwart treu sein wird.

Mir geht es so, dass ich mich gerade so fühle, als ob ich von Feinden umzingelt bin. Mich bedrückt es, dass dieser Feind unsichtbar ist und überall lauert, sogar global. Es gibt keine klare Front. In vielen Ländern werden Menschen geboten Schutz zu suchen und dort zu bleiben, als ob ein Luftangriff oder Wirbelsturm ansteht. Dieses „nicht wissen was passiert“ ist sehr anstrengend und schürt eine Angst, die droht meine Seele anzugreifen.

So nehme ich mir das Beispiel des Autors zu Herzen, und erinnere mich an all das Gute, was Gott mir in den vergangen Jahren meines Lebens erwiesen hat. Er hat mich und meine Familie durch viele Anfechtungen und Herausforderungen gebracht, und hat uns seine zarte Fürsorge sehen und spüren lassen. Obwohl ich nicht unverschont durch die Krisen gekommen bin, ist mein Glaube gewachsen. Dieses Erinnern hilft mir dabei auch jetzt Zuflucht bei Gott zu suchen, und mich in seiner Liebe zu bergen. Weil er ein starker, unbeweglicher Fels ist, kann ich mich in Gott bergen, bis die Gefahr

vorbei ist. An diesem Ort der inneren Sicherheit preise ich Gott für seine Gnade, Barmherzigkeit, Treue, und zarte Fürsorge. Und ich werde gestärkt.

—Stephen McPeck is a transitional deacon of the Diocese of Hawaii serving as curate at the Church of Saint Augustine of Canterbury, Wiesbaden.

Ecclesiastes 9:12 “For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.”

“No man is an island,” wrote the great Anglican priest, preacher and poet John Donne, whose feast we honor today. How cruelly ironic do those words ring today, when government and health officials throughout the world can speak only of “social distancing” and “confinement” and “self-isolation.”

In Switzerland, a country proud to proclaim itself an island in the middle of Europe, many people stubbornly, and in the face of all contrary evidence, continued until very recently to deny the reality of the looming catastrophe. Here in Geneva, the customary hordes of tourists, some fleeing the virus at home, snapped selfies in front of the graceful Jet d’Eau or admired the riotous colors of the early blooming fruit trees. The locals cycled along the lovely lake shore, or jammed cafés, soaking up the unseasonably warm sunshine.

“Enjoy all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun”: the writer of Ecclesiastes does not condemn the simple pleasures in which we indulge. On the contrary: we are to find delight in those things while, however, bearing in mind that they can be snatched away from us without warning.

When that happens, especially on the global scale that we are now living, anxiety and despair and anger set in. What if I lose my job? Am I part of the small percentage who may die? Why didn’t the government close the borders sooner?

Amidst all this, I am struck every day by the hope and the wisdom and the fullness of joy that the writer of Psalm 16 talks about. With the schools closed, I see parents and children out and about, clearly taking delight in each other’s company. People forced to work at home are eager to deliver supplies to the quarantined. Our inreach team has divided up the church directory so that we can call every single parishioner and offer our help.

My prayer for this period unlike any other that I have ever experienced is for us to treasure the interconnectedness that we have reacquired, to recognize all the angels who are miraculously there when we need them most, and not to forget the lessons learned once the crisis is finally past.

Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you. You are my Lord, my good above all other. (Psalm 16)

—*Richard Cole is Secretary of Convention for the Convocation and deacon at Emmanuel Church, Geneva.*



The Jet d'Eau, Geneva

Psalm 119:169: "Let my cry come before You, O Lord; Give me understanding according to Your word."

As I write this, our community is being encouraged to stand back, leave room, and to learn the art of "social distancing." It astonishes me that the concept has been understood and embraced so quickly. Arms-length, two seats between, walk alone, don't touch: social distancing recognizes that I pose a threat to everyone around me, and they pose a threat to me.

In today's verse, David needed God to hear something from his heart. The psalmist is wonderfully skilled in expressing his thoughts directly, but here he steps back and asks that his "cry" be permitted to approach God alone. David does not ask to come before God himself. He does not ask God to come to him. Rather, he asks God to hear his prayer directly without David's weaknesses and failings standing in the way. David distanced himself from his plea in an effort to keep his prayer pure and uncontaminated by his own unworthiness.

In the second half of the verse, David asks for vision to see God's purpose; as [Calvin wrote of this verse](#), "he beseeches God to endue him with understanding, in fulfillment of his promise. And whilst God liberally promises all blessings to his people, to enlighten them by his Spirit, that they may excel in true and sound wisdom, is justly entitled to be ranked among the chief of his promises."

We are all struggling to see God's purpose. We are bombarded daily with information, but very little "true and sound wisdom." The Psalm draws us to cede control to God, knowing that he will give us understanding. We do not know what we will be given to understand, but we do know that our prayers can bear the weight of all our worry and all our fears. Relieving ourselves of that weight can open us to the blessing of his understanding.

Grant us, dear Father, understanding according to Your word. Take from us the burden of our worry and fears and enlighten us through the presence of your Spirit in our lives. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

—Marlene Greenberg is the Senior Warden of the Church of Christ the King, Frankfurt.

Marco 10:21: "Gesù, guardatolo, lo amò"

Lo sguardo di Gesù cerca una relazione e, addirittura, ama l'altro.

Colui che "se ne va dolente", ha percepito quello sguardo d'amore su di sé?

Esiste una ricchezza più grande di essere amati?

Fino a quando rimaniamo attaccati alle nostre ricchezze, quelle da noi accumulate, forse anche faticosamente guadagnate, sembra che lasciamo poco spazio affinché lo sguardo amorevole dell'altro possa arrivare a destinazione.

L'amore vuole essere accolto, chiede una vulnerabilità, domanda di essere ascoltato, e forse è proprio questo a cui ci prepara la quaresima e, in particolare modo, questa quaresima.

Il Covid 19 non solo ha scombussolato le nostre rassicuranti abitudini quotidiane, ma ha dimostrato a paesi e continenti interi che ciò che pensavamo fosse sicuro, in realtà non è che un castello di carta. Uno degli aspetti inquietanti di questa malattia è che ci toglie il respiro. Sembra persino che siamo lasciati soli nel momento del passaggio.

Ognuno, recluso in casa propria, si ritrova a meditare su tutto ciò e intanto la terra ritorna a respirare. I pesci riscoprono i canali di Venezia, i delfini amoreggiano nel porto di Cagliari, varie città popolate e inquinate dall'uomo, vengono nuovamente attraversate dagli altri esseri del creato. La primavera della natura irrompe in maniera quasi sfacciata.

"Va', vendi tutto ciò che hai e dallo ai poveri."

Ciascuno di noi è, in un modo o nell'altro, come quel tale che rimane attaccato ai propri beni a tal punto da non percepire che il mondo è vasto e creato per la condivisione. Come a lui, probabilmente ci capita di pensare che dobbiamo salvarci da soli. Se questo è vero, vuole anche dire che ciascuno di noi vive sotto lo sguardo di Gesù ed è profondamente amato.

"vieni e seguimi!"

In questo tempo di deserto possiamo cercare di seguirLo spogliandoci del superfluo, anche della paura, per lasciare che quello sguardo ci colpisca nelle nostre parti più intime e pregare affinché chi stia soffrendo, lottando, attraversando la

soglia possa accogliere lo sguardo di Colui che ci ama dal giorno in cui ci ha creato. Vieni, Signore Gesù!

—*Paola Canu is resident at the Santa Maria Center for Art and Spirituality,
Ferrano, Italy.*



Santa Maria a Ferrano

Psalm 95:4: "In his hand are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also."

This verse immediately sends my thoughts back to my teenage years when I visited a distant cousin, a little older than me. It was the Easter holidays and while staying with her family she took me to the nearby Peak District, a region of deep pot-holes and caverns. Despite being unsuitably dressed and shod we entered one of these caverns from above descending a narrow staircase hewn in the limestone. The steps were dangerously slippery due to the constant drip of water from the roof and walls. It was pitch dark and the only light came from our two flickering candles. I was terrified but tried not to show it even when three boy scouts appeared, the only other people there, and blew out our candles. My fear continued when on emerging onto the hillside almost an hour later we were caught up in a blizzard that threatened to cut off the village where we were.

Fear draws us into our personal caverns. Fear of the unknown, solitude, isolation, loss. Even Christ experienced moments of fear in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yet the psalmist rejoices because the caverns as well as the hills he sees as being in God's hands.

In this time of uncertainty, many people are fearful of what life holds for them, not just in the next weeks but how it will change their future. Normally, in times of disaster, people turn to the church and God for their strength but today even our churches are finding it difficult to reach out to them because the doors are closed. My prayer today is that we can find ways to reach out to those around us who are fearful and show them by our strength and fortitude that God will stand by us all.

Lord Christ, may all those affected in whatever way by this terrible virus be comforted and strengthened by the knowledge that you are there to hold and support them.

*—Carole Ducastel is a member of the Council of Advice
and a parishioner of All Saints, Waterloo.*

2 Corinthians 4:15–16: “Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart....”

“So we do not lose heart”—I can’t think of more appropriate or uplifting words right now. But Paul continues, “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.”

On the first day of World History class in high school, our teacher drew a line across the chalkboard and said, “This line represents all of human history on earth. How much of this line does your life occupy?” After several suggestions ranging from one inch to a foot, he snapped his fingers and said, “You are THAT, barely a flicker on this line.” That image of being “just a flicker” has stayed with me. Our lives, however, are experienced against a background not just of Earth’s time, but of all eternity. That makes our self-isolation, this virus and its related sufferings very temporary indeed. Painful, yes, but passing. And really, how could we bear the “weight of eternal glory” if this brief affliction crushes our spirit so easily?

We do not lose heart “because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus.” Our daily lives are lived in the “Zoom” function of a camera lens. We focus on the everyday events and people who are right up in our faces. This can cause not only a great deal of stress, but a loss of the perspective of importance. Paul is asking us to pull that lens back not just to wide angle, not just to a universal, but all the way to an eternal panorama. This places our lives in the frame of God’s perspective. It buys us much-needed psychological space and gives us the grace to endure.

May we pass through this trying time gracefully, staying focused on eternal glory, and your undying love.

—Lois Stuckenbruck is a parishioner of the Church of the Ascension, Munich.

Luke 19:41–42: “As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!”

In Jerusalem, to see a man walking on a donkey is...quite ordinary. For me, it conveys images of Bedouin men and teenagers, sometimes attending to a flock, going from one hill to another, in the Judean wilderness. It does not look comfortable, nor fast. On the opposite, a donkey’s pace forces you to slow down. Also, unlike a horse (or a camel!), a donkey will not give you much more height.

Jesus rides the donkey as he is on his way to Jerusalem. From the Mount of Olives, a place near Bethphage and Bethany, he can see the City ahead of him.

And he cries.

While “the multitude of the disciples” is shouting, praising God joyfully, Jesus is weeping. Jesus is riding to his death and the loneliness he may feel at the moment, in his full humanity, would be a good enough reason for him to weep.



Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives today

Yet, what makes him weep is the blindness that impedes people from seeing “the things that make for peace.”

What makes for peace?

The joy of the multitude is shallow: “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” will soon give way to “Crucify him!”

Some of us may have felt “forced into peace” recently, with confinement, and the resulting inability to travel, visit family and friends, share a meal, enjoy an exhibition, a concert.... Though cities sound surprisingly peaceful, this has been a source of anxiety, torment, profound loneliness for those of us whose health condition prevent them from engaging with anyone in person—even the fear of death.

Yet, there have been signs of things which, on a deeper level, work for peace. Here, the Palestinian and Israeli authorities joined their efforts to take efficient measures to contain the SARS-CoV-2. Cooperation in the medical field was deemed essential to fight the virus. The air quality in major cities has radically improved. And while fear prompts racism and xenophobia, compassion and love have made God’s face visible to many others.

What makes for (true) peace in our current situations? Let us build on this.

Gracious God, people are dying, people are afraid, and this situation has put on hold so many of our activities, giving us space to pay closer attention to this; direct our hearts and minds that we may learn from this exceptional time and look for the signs of light and peace that can lead us together to you. Through Christ, our Lord, who joins us in tears as well as in hope. *Amen.*

—*Stephanie Burette is a transitional deacon in the Convocation and the Porter Fellow at Saint George’s College, Jerusalem.*

Mark 11:25: "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

When I lived in Seattle, a parishioner at St. Mark's Cathedral always arrived well before the start of service. He sat in the same place, to the left and far up, in a chair. I didn't know his name, but I would sit across the aisle, in a pew close by, just to watch him pray. He always looked calm, fingertips lined up gently in front of him. The man radiated calm, and a complete lack of hurry. He was fluent in the language of prayer.

The recent weeks with their worry and wonder have thrust many people into prayer. Prayer from home, since we can't gather in our sanctuaries. Many of us do not feel like prayer experts these days, but we are fast-tracking that skill.

Prayer is a funny thing, how it changes and grows with us. A basic prayer concept, and one that is very easy for almost anyone to grasp, is that it is a time to ask God for something. For a child, a prayer feels a lot like a verbal Christmas list, God, give me this, give me that. I really want these things. The wished-for items are often concrete. This sometimes transitions to a prayer to Make something stop. An annoying person, a difficult course, a hailstorm, a plague of locusts. A recovery from a terrible illness, a sudden and severe accident. The petitions change with time. God, grant me strength, or courage, or patience, to deal with something. We want to be better. God can give us something to make us better people.

But prayer continues to change over the years. It grows. It becomes, if you keep at it, a mystical conversation, spoken in the language of the heart, between you and God. In fact, it is a lot like learning a second language. It takes time to become fluent. You learn to speak first, then to form questions. You learn how to read, then read more. You learn how to write basic sentences and ideas. And lastly, in the arc of language learning, comes comprehension. It's almost impossible to understand a native speaker in your beginning years of language learning, particularly if context is lacking. It takes years of listening to make any kind of sense of it all, much less understand it intuitively.

And so slowly, when you pray, you begin to listen more. You've learned how to ask questions and how to answer them; you can write basic sentences; you can read simple texts. You begin to let go of the Christmas list, of everything you wish for and want, of all the things and people you want to stop doing or being

whatever they're doing or being. And you start to hear what God is asking of you. God is praying back to you when you are praying to Him. And it is very possible that what God is praying back to you is for you to listen and speak in His language. To forgive. To love. To remember this, every time you stand to pray, that you examine your own heart to discern what God might gently point out to you. The communication that takes place during prayer is a two-way street. You're not calling God to listen to a prerecorded message. You're not calling God to record an audio message.

Try to listen to what God is asking of you. Put aside your wish list, no matter how earnest, and ask Him what He needs from you now. Because chances are good that now, in this moment, He needs us more than ever. So sit in a chair, take a deep breath, touch your fingertips together, and listen.

—Monica Sharp is a member of the Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized and a parishioner of Saint James's, Florence.

2 Corinthians 1:20 "For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.' For this reason it is through him that we say the Amen, to the glory of God."

When preparing for this meditation, we came upon this reading and thought "Yes! We remember this—it's a bit like in James' "Let your yes be yes, your no no." But then, of course, no! We were pulled back: this is not at all about our yes. It's about God's yes.

But "Yes" as God's promise to us, what does that mean? The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison about what this Yes meant to him. He said: What is certain is that we have no claim on anything but may ask for everything; what is certain is that in suffering lies hidden the source of our joy, in dying the source of our life; what is certain is that in all this we stand within a community that carries us. To all this, God has said Yes and Amen in Jesus. This Yes and Amen is the solid ground upon which we stand. Again and again in these turbulent times, we lose sight of why life is really worth living. But if the earth was deemed worthy to bear the human being Jesus Christ, if a human being like Jesus lived, then our lives as human beings have meaning.

But to God's call Yes and Amen, Paul also urges us to give our own response of Amen. It seems so easy—Amen; we say it so often. Almost to the point that it risks losing some of its force—a pious reflex (somewhat like saying Bless You after a sneeze), not a wholehearted credo. But it's more than the signing of a contract: it's putting our hopes in God's Yes: Amen - "let it be so". Living under God's promise makes it possible for us to live, in the midst of suffering and dissonance, but also delight and joy—simply as who we are. Luckily, this ever-presence of Amen can help us. Because we say it so often—in church, praying before bed, around the table after saying grace, or even when one of those unexpected prayers springs up in us when seeing the blossoms open on the cherry tree in our courtyard or when a flock of green parakeets flashes over the rooftops—we're constantly invited to renew our embrace of God's Yes.

And, therefore, today's prayer will be: Amen, Amen and Amen.

*—Thomas Huddleston and Stefan Jochems are parishioners
of All Saints', Waterloo.*

Psalm 55:22: "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous stumble."

What a comfort! The Lord will sustain me, He will hold me up. It's like what Jesus said to his disciples "...do not worry about your life,... Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:25-26)

What a timely reminder! As we face anxiety and uncertainty, while watching the authorities and leaders try to do their best (not forgetting that this is as unknown and unprecedented for them as it is for us), we are reminded that our Lord will watch over us.

Yet, what does it really mean to "Cast your burden"? One definition suggests that 'cast' means to throw something forcefully in a specified direction. So if we were to cast our burdens to the Lord, it would mean to throw them at Him, to take our worries like a ball in our hand and toss it out. It is an intentional act. The ball leaves and flies away from us. Ouf, what a relief!

But are we really able to do that? It sure is reassuring to know that He's got me, but it often feels like there is still so much that I need to/ should/ would like to do. So, here's the second part—we are reminded to "Cast your burden upon the Lord." Not to just anyone, not to on our own understanding, but upon our Lord Jesus Christ. He who knows our heart, He who will not give us anything more than we can bear, He our perpetual catcher.

So today, I would like to be more intentional. I want to be more aware of my worries, then take them and throw them to God. There will always be another ball to throw, the next one may look exactly like the one that I thought I tossed, another may be a completely different one. Some balls are smaller and easier to pitch, some may be bigger and we might need someone else to help us throw it out together. But I know that our perpetual catcher is and will always be there.

Dear Lord, you have promised that we can cast our burdens on you and you will sustain us; grant us the courage to see our troubles, the faith to commit them to you, and the peace to trust that you've got us.

*—Joyce Chanay is a parishioner
of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, Paris.*

Mark 14: 22 "While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.'"

These last five words, spoken by Jesus with no preparation after the meal had started, in an atmosphere of fear and betrayal, must have come to the disciples as unintelligible. Even those with simple faith could not have fully understood what they were hearing. Jesus was announcing his greatest gift to humanity for the rest of time: his body in the shape of bread and his blood in the form of wine, later to be received by multitudes at all times and in all places. How could the disciples have absorbed this truth when Jesus had not yet risen from the dead? This moment also foreshadows the world of today, when Christian belief is unintelligible to most of humanity. Today, two millennia after that momentous first Eucharist, during a locked-out Lent, the world shrugs. We are in a way like the first Christians, convening in rented rooms if that. We are left without our holy shelter while a plague stalks the land.

Does our locked Cathedral portend a further shrinking of our numbers? Are we preparing to make up for any such losses by strengthening our prayer life? Are we trying to pray more deeply this Lent than ever? Are we creating a church space of some sort in our homes? Or are we just waiting to return after Easter?

Somehow this churchless Lent and Easter presents us with an historic opportunity to strengthen our faith, hope and love. Jesus never meant that we settle for the comforts of a cathedral. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" should be in our minds as we lament our current inconvenience. It must strike us, as in the cited passage, how Jesus has always been betrayed by his own. But in return he has given us the Eucharist and life everlasting.

So let us use our imaginations to find a way to a renewed strength. Let us wash each others' feet on this Maundy Thursday and let us fast on Good Friday and let us rejoice on Easter morning.

Dear Lord, make this Lent the strongest of our lives, not just despite our deprivation, but because of it.

—*Joe Coyle is a parishioner
of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, Paris.*

John 19:39: "Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds."

We meet Nicodemus for the first time in the third chapter of John's gospel. You know the place, you know the man. He's the one who asks Jesus those impertinent questions, the ones that make all kinds of sense in light of what Jesus was telling him.

Jesus: "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus: "How can anyone be born after having grown old?"

Which prompts Jesus to say the words some of us memorized as children and still carry in our hearts: "For God so loved the world..."

Nicodemus reappears, very briefly, in chapter 19 of John's gospel. He came to the tomb, perhaps with newfound courage, wisdom, insight, faith. Nicodemus serves as an assistant now, carrying the sweet-smelling spices, doing the necessary work no one else do. Nicodemus, the self-assured religious leader, was silent at the end. He came not as an apostle of the night, but as a follower of the light. He stood as a witness, bearing spices of worship and praise and hope, whose aroma will be carried by the wind that blows where it will.

In these days of living with the Coronavirus, which have all felt a little like Good Friday, Nicodemus is our companion. We learn from his silence, his willingness to let go of being in control, his unspoken yet absolutely clear love of Jesus.

On this Good Friday, when we will not be able to sing "Were you there" together ([here is Jessye Norman singing it](#), if you'd like to sing along) or kneel at the foot of the cross, maybe it's enough to pray this prayer from the Good Friday Liturgy, knowing that around the Convocation, others will pray it in the solitude of their kitchens and living rooms.

Gracious and generous God, help us to see in Nicodemus a companion on our journey, a reminder of the depth and power of your love on this day we call good.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light:
Look favorably on your whole Church,
that wonderful and sacred mystery;
by the effectual working of your providence,
carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation;
let the whole world see and know
that things which were cast down are being raised up,
and things which had grown old are being made new,
and that all things are being brought to their perfection
by him through whom all things were made,
your Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, p. 280)

—*Allan Sandlin is the priest-in-charge of the Church of the Ascension, Munich.*

Psalm 27:17: "What if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!"

Were you there, when they laid him in the tomb? This is the day, the day when he is dead, truly dead. All hope is lost, and we had thought he was the one who would redeem our people.

On Holy Saturday, we usually put ourselves in the place of the friends of Jesus, in their despair, in their sense of shock and loss and fear. We imagine what we saw yesterday, as he hung on the cross. We prayed desperately that somehow God would save him. But nothing did. Nothing. So this day, we go about in mourning all the day long, suffocating in the pain of knowing he who we thought was the light of the world is now in the complete and utter darkness of the tomb. It is sealed and he is gone.

How can the Psalmist suggest, at a time like this, that we should believe that we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living?

But this year, Holy Saturday is different. Very, very, *very* different. While in the past I thought of myself as being like the disciples outside the tomb, this year I am not outside. I am not outside because outside is more dangerous than inside.

So now I wonder not what it was like for the disciples, but for Jesus.

As I write this I am in the early days of the Covid19 lockdown. I still don't know what is ahead, what it will feel like, how I will be—by the time Holy Saturday arrives.

We don't know how it was for Jesus, either. We say in our creed "He descended to the dead"—but then what? Like that annoying Christmas song about Mary, "Jesus, did you know?" Jesus did you know you would not stay among the dead?

On this day, Jesus, were the words of this Psalm with you?

"What if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the Lord / in the land of the living!"

In the face of the unknown, in the darkness of the tomb, give me peace, dear God. Give me peace.

—Sunny Hallanan is a priest serving Convocation congregations in Belgium and the Republic of Georgia.

Exodus 12:14: “The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”

Never in all my years of ministry have the Passover themes of our Easter feast seemed so real, so poignant, and so urgent. The old spiritual “Go Down, Moses” describes our situation perfectly: We are oppressed so hard we cannot stand. We do not dare to go out of our doors, lest the plague sweeping through our world of this deadly virus claim us as well.

Few of us, I suppose, have ever prayed so fervently to be passed over. I am sure for our Jewish brothers and sisters, these days of Passover are all the more meaningful—especially in places where families cannot gather because of ongoing restrictions on movement.

As Christians, we understand the blood of Jesus to be our sign on the doorpost. We understand that the plague of complete separation from God has been passed over for us—that the Way of Love has opened to us a new covenant with God, one that has set us apart from the death of our sins and restored us in God’s eternal life.

That fact is a source of profound joy, no matter where we find ourselves celebrating it. If we have empty churches today as we celebrate the empty tomb, we still have full hearts. If we cannot be together in our beloved communities—these blessed people we have been missing so much, with whom we share the joys and the challenges of the walk of Faith—we can still be united in prayer. If we cannot share the bread and the cup that has sustained us all these years, we can still be sustained by the spiritual communion that draws us all in the Spirit’s tether, no matter where we are.

Remember, out of that empty tomb comes resurrection. Out of that empty tomb comes victory. Out of that empty tomb comes our claim to be Christ’s own forever, no matter what. Maybe, just maybe, when the sun rises after this night of darkness, that will be what comes out of our empty churches, too.

Lord, you passed through the grave and gate of death, that we might have eternal life; give us the joy of Easter morning, and let us hear your voice greeting us as you greeted Mary: “Do not be afraid.”

God bless you—and keep the faith.

—*Michael B. Curry is the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.*

Psalm 98: "With trumpets and the sound of the horn shout with joy before the King, the Lord. Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it, the lands and those who dwell therein. Let the rivers clap their hands, and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord."

Mark 16:8: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Easter! Trumpets and shouts of joy, rivers clapping their hands and all creation rejoicing. And now it is Easter Monday and we begin the Great Fifty Days.

Christ is risen! So, why does it feel so anti-climatic today?

Of course, like all clergy I am exhausted. (My idea of the perfect Easter Monday is to spend the day in my pajamas.) But it's more than that.

I love the drama of Holy Week, moving from the hosannas of Palm Sunday to the darkness and death of Good Friday. I love the Great Vigil, beginning in darkness, moving into light and the first triumphant shout of Alleluia!—and then on to Easter Day itself. But then? Now what?

We are Easter people, but we know more about a Good Friday world; we are familiar with betrayal, suffering and death. We yearn for resurrection and occasionally we taste it. But Easter Monday often brings us back with a thump to the "real" world.

In God's reality, Easter joy is always present and resurrection is all around. But we see that only dimly, and it is often too much for us, so we deny it. We encounter the living Christ and we flee, for we fear it is just too good to be true.

Perhaps that is why I like the resurrection account in Mark that ends so abruptly, with the women fleeing from the empty tomb in fear and amazement. That actually makes more sense to me: we should be full of amazement, and overwhelmed.

I think it will take a very long time—a lifetime and more—for Easter joy to be fully known to me. My heart and soul need to grow. I know Good Friday now, but I am on a journey to Easter.

Gracious God, open my heart and soul in these fifty days of Easter to your life and your joy.

*—Lucinda Laird is dean and rector
of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, Paris.*

Mark 16:20: "And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it."

Job description: organized, competent, and a self-starter...does this list sound like some of the requirements you might have seen for a job, for which you have applied in the past? I have so often read the words "self-starter" to really mean, "can you start and finish the job all by yourself?" Now, there are certainly some tasks best done alone: I can't imagine, for instance, ironing a shirt as a team. That being said, while there are aspects of practicing the faith that are often done alone, it seems like mission work is a team effort. Aside from the amazing witness of Mary Magdalene on that resurrection morning, who is not only first on the scene but is also a soloist in her efforts as evangelist, there is a certain sense of teamwork in doing the Gospel-sharing thing. Jesus appears to one, then two, then eleven, and then sends them out not as individuals. Not only that, they didn't have to be self-starters but the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message with signs. They got support and regular feedback from Jesus... post-Ascension, no less!

The post-Resurrection eleven, Judas no longer being among them, were admonished by Jesus at the table and still entrusted with the work of the kingdom. Jesus is interested in our success. That success is not measured by numbers but by simply doing—sharing the good news everywhere. I think about how often we try to do so much alone. How quickly ego, fear, pride, insecurities, and the like drive a wedge between us and the others the Lord has called into service. And, at the same time, when do you recall moments of joy in sharing the good news with others in your teaching, preaching, administrating, organizing, evangelizing, worshiping, listening, and just being with someone in need? When have you also seen the signs confirming the work you are doing with the Risen Christ? They are there. I'm sure of it.

O God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lift us up, move our feet, raise our hands, and open our eyes and hearts to the work we do with you. Amen

—*Scott A. Moore is the Vicar at St. James the Less, Nuremberg and Missioner in Thuringia.*

1 Corinthiens 15:49: "Et de même que nous avons porté l'image du terrestre, nous porterons aussi l'image du céleste."

Le mystère de Pâques nous met sous les yeux le projet éternel de Dieu. Dieu a créé la vie, nous l'a donnée. La terre est le matériau dont nous fûmes créés, auquel Dieu insuffla son esprit, l'esprit de vie. L'Ancien Testament conte comment, après la perte de l'innocence originelle, Dieu s'épuisa à maintenir l'alliance avec son peuple, désormais mortel. Et son ultime effort fut de s'incarner en un être mortel lui aussi et de reprendre tout son ouvrage pour nous faire retrouver notre origine et accomplir le destin qu'il avait voulu pour nous, de tout temps. Être à son image.

La mort du Christ et son enterrement sont le passage obligé de ce rachat. Sa Résurrection est l'invitation à reprendre possession du paradis que nous avons perdu. Dieu nous ouvre une porte que nous pensions close. C'est ce que Paul nous dit : la poussière est notre origine, elle n'est pas notre destin. La poussière séparée de l'esprit était la mort. Réunie à l'esprit, l'être redevient complet et fidèle à son origine. Qui a vu le corps d'un être aimé défunt a eu cette pensée : ce n'est plus lui, ce n'est plus elle. Non, ce n'est plus la personne que nous avons connue, le corps est vide, dur et froid.

Qu'advient-il alors, non pas du corps, voué à la disparition, mais de cette âme où notre part d'esprit trouve son abri ? Paul nous en donne l'assurance, nous porterons l'image du céleste, comme nous avons porté un temps l'image du terrestre. C'est, dans les moments de deuil, une idée que nous pouvons avoir du mal à concevoir. Et ce ne sont pas les recherches sur les expériences de « mort approchée » qui peuvent apporter une vraie réponse à ce doute. C'est la grâce qui nous est donnée de croire en Jésus et d'être sûrs de la promesse qu'il nous a faite, au nom du Père : « Je suis la Résurrection. Qui croit en moi, même s'il meurt, vivra ; et quiconque vit et croit en moi ne mourra jamais » (Jean, 11 :25-26).

Cette certitude, affermie chaque matin de Pâques, doit nous accompagner jusqu'à notre départ de la Terre ; la dernière prière avec laquelle l'Eglise accompagne le corps des défunts nous la rappelle. C'est le pauvre Lazare, pendant sa vie terrestre à peine plus qu'un tas de boue, qui l'accueillera dans la vie nouvelle :

« Que les anges te conduisent au paradis ;
qu'à ton arrivée les martyrs te reçoivent
et t'introduisent dans la cité sainte, Jérusalem.

Que le chœur des anges te reçoive,
et qu'avec Lazare, le pauvre de jadis,
tu jouisses du repos éternel. »

Seigneur, emplis-nous à jamais de ton Esprit qui donne vie, et donne-nous d'accomplir ce que tu as voulu pour nous dès le commencement, par Jésus le Christ, ton Fils, notre Sauveur.

—*Denis Le Moullac is Treasurer of the Convocation.*

1 Korinther 15,43: „Es wird gesät in Niedrigkeit und wird auferstehen in Herrlichkeit. Es wird gesät in Schwachheit und wird auferstehen in Kraft.“

Vor über 45 Jahren, während meiner Schulzeit, las ich zum ersten Mal Albert Camus Roman «Die Pest», das einen großen Einfluss auf mich hatte. In der vergangenen Woche habe ich das Buch noch einmal gelesen und eine Zeile unter vielen Anderen ist mir besonders aufgefallen.

In seiner zweiten Predigt sagt Père Paneloux, nachdem schon in den vorherigen 250 Seiten schreckliches Leiden geschildert worden ist, « Mais la religion du temps de peste ne pouvait être la religion de tous les jours et si Dieu pouvait admettre, et même désirer, que l'âme se repose et se réjouisse dans les bonheur, il la voulait excessive dans les excès du malheur. » («Aber die Religion zur Zeit der Pest kann nicht die Religion aller Tage sein, und wenn Gott zuließe und sogar wünschte, dass die Seele sich in Zeiten des Glücks ausruhe und erfreue, so wollte er sie maßlos im äußersten Unglück.»)

Heute finden wir uns in solch einer Lage wieder. Die Seele jedes Christen steht vor einer Herausforderung, in manchen Fällen vor einer Maßlosen. Obwohl die Lehren des Jesuitenpaters Père Paneloux von Camus nicht unbedingt die sind, mit der wir uns heute in unserer Kirche identifizieren würden, kann man dennoch sein Anliegen nachvollziehen.

In der heutigen Lesung, die aus dem ersten Brief des hl. Paulus an die Korinther stammt, werden wir daran erinnert, dass wir nicht nur physische (verwesliche) Wesen sind, sondern auch Wesen die eine ewige (unverwesliche) Existenz haben. Paulus bezeichnet dies als den physischen Leib und den spirituellen Leib. Durch die «Pest» wird unsere normale Existenz bedroht. Manche, die sich mit diesem Nova Corona Virus anstecken, erleben nur einen leichten Verlauf der Krankheit, manche werden schwer erkranken, manche sogar sterben. Die Religion der Pestzeit ist eine Religion, die das bewältigen kann. Sie ist eine Religion des Lebens und des Todes.

In jeder «Pestzeit», in einer Zeit der Unsicherheit und der Bedrohung unseres physischen Körpers, geben uns die Worte des heiligen Paulus nicht nur Trost, sondern zeigen uns auch einen Weg. «Die Religion der Pestzeit» ist eine Religion, die uns zu neuen Herausforderungen ruft, aber die uns auch den Trost der großen christlichen Hoffnung auf das ewige Leben vor Augen hält. „Es

wird gesät in Niedrigkeit und wird auferstehen in Herrlichkeit. Es wird gesät in Schwachheit und wird auferstehen in Kraft.“

—*Walter Baer is the Archdeacon of the Convocation.*

Psalm 133:1: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

This beautiful verse from psalm reminds us one of corner stone meaning of Christian religion—social unity of human beings. As it is written in Wikipedia, "A society is a group of individuals involved in persistent social interaction." We are connected to God as individuals, but our interaction with each other in our faith communities makes us one big spiritual family.

It is enough to read the Acts of the Apostles to know how important communal and social life was for first-century Christian believers. To be a good Christian does not mean only to serve God, but also to serve one another—and the whole of God's creation.

For me, personally, Great Lent is period when it is important to turn from outside (and I have a very active social life) to inside, to think about God and my tiny place in this gracious God's creation. German/Austrian philosopher and esotericist Rudolf Steiner said: "When you are close with your 'me,' you are close with God inside you."

While we are isolated from one another by reason of this virus, we have an opportunity not only to talk to our creator, but also to listen in silence. After all, remember that God talked to the prophet Elijah in a whisper (1 Kings 19: 11-13). At school I studied wise English proverb which is very relevant for today—"Sometimes silence is the best answer." As we emerge from this time of isolation, let us remember the value of silence in our communities, that God may have a place in our dwelling together.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, I wish you a contemplative Lent—and a joyful Easter.

Lord Jesus, you are unifier of humanity, we humbly ask you to heal the pain of our loneliness, and like the prophet Elijah grant us talent to find you in the sound of whisper.

—Thoma Lipartiani is the Worship Leader of the Mission of Saint Nino, Tbilisi, Georgia.



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