**Cloistered in a cloister**

**Grant Bayliss, Diocesan Canon Precentor at Christ Church, Oxford, has a cathedral on his doorstep. How does he feel about staying at home?**

Many of my old students will remember me going on (and on, and on) in sacraments classes that “matter matters”, and, to misquote Thomas Aquinas: “We can’t hope to understand anything with our minds that we haven’t grasped with our physical senses first.” So what do I do when the matter has been taken away? When I can’t touch the blessed bread or taste the wine?

Well, this Sunday, I’ll be making a spiritual communion. It’s an old idea that was important in the medieval Church and has often got a little lost or confused. But even when the Reformers rewrote our service books to bring back all the tasting and the touching, restoring the breaking of real bread and the sharing of a common cup to the people, it found a home in the new Anglican theology of Cranmer’s 1549 Prayer Book. At the end of his service for “the Order for Visitation of the Sick and the Communion of the Same”, he wrote:

*But yf any man eyther by reason of extremitie of sickenesse, or for lacke of warnynge geven in due tyme, to the curate, or by any other just impedimente, doe not receyne the sacramente of Christes bodye and bloud then the curate shall instruct hym, that yf he doe truly repent hym of his sinnes and stedfastly beleve that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the crosse for hym, and shed his bloud for his redempcion, earnestly remembering the benefites he hath therby, and geving hym hertie thankes therfore; he doeth eate and drynk spiritually the bodye and bloud of our savioure Christe, profitably to his soules helth, although he doe not receyve the sacrament with his mouth.*

And there it has stayed through all the editions ever since: a little disclaimer… God chooses sacraments like the eucharist to meet us, but he never said he would *only* meet us there, *only* love us *if* we physically ate, *only* bless us *if* we literally drank.

Cloistered up in Cloister House as a precautionary measure to protect my wife, I can’t claim “extremitie of sicknesse”; but there is another “just impedimente” that means not just I but almost all of us cannot receive the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood…

But I will watch and I will pray. I will repent me of my sins and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ has suffered death upon the cross for me, for you, for the whole world. I will remember Christ’s benefits to me and give hearty thanks…And be reassured…that I am eating and drinking spiritually the body and blood of our Saviour Christ, profitably to my soul’s health, although I do not receive the sacrament with my mouth.

Wherever you are this Sunday and whatever you do, while our churches are shut and so many self-isolating, may you know God’s love, his presence and his peace.

**Anthony Priddis, the former Bishop of Hereford, recalls a booklet written by Mother Mary Clare St. G, *Aloneness not Loneliness:***

That theme has always been vital, but now it takes on a heightened significance for our times. We are witnessing many people discover the truth about which Mother Mary Clare wrote. It is helped by all the opportunities that social media provide, but it needs the disposition of the heart to want to reach out to others, to know that we are made for relationship, not for being isolated and lonely. The perspective of being alone, of physical rather than social distancing, heightens our awareness of the need for relating, for caring as well as being cared for, and this, it seems to me, is what we are seeing across our nation at the moment. We are seeing a shift back from “I” to “We”. Wouldn’t it be marvellous if that shift shaped the next years of our society?