

An Act of Spiritual Communion

Introduction

We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church

The word *Catholic* means *universal*. We believe that we are not just part of the church community where we live, but we are united with the Church Universal throughout time and eternity and Christ is ever-present with us. This is essential to remember, most especially when we find ourselves separated from the physical presence of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

An Act of Spiritual Communion is intended for those who cannot receive the Holy Sacrament due to unusual circumstances. Whilst it is not intended to be used as common practice, neither is it make-believe: just as God is able to make himself present in the bread and wine, so he is able to make himself present in our hearts.

¶ *The Gathering*

The Greeting

Prayer of Preparation

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The Lord is here.

His Spirit is with us.

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

As we prepare to celebrate the presence of Christ,
let us call to mind and confess our sins.

**Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our
neighbours as ourselves. In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.**

Prayers of Penitence

Grant, we beseech you, merciful Lord,
to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their
sins and serve you with a quiet mind;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

The Collect for Passion Sunday

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

¶ *The Liturgy of the Word*

The Gospel reading of the day.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

John 11:17-45

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Reflection for today

The reflection this week is given by Sam Gibson, Curate.

The raising of Lazarus is an intricate story, with multiple scenes and memorable phrases. I hope you managed to cope with my long reading of it! I thought it important to keep the whole passage, so that we get a sense of how the story unfolds.

This is not just a parable, an imagined tale, like Jesus often tells his disciples. Lazarus was a real man, with recorded witnesses to his life, including Mary and Martha his sisters. John often uses named characters like these to let readers know that he is drawing on eyewitness testimony events. Perhaps Mary, Martha and Lazarus were even well-known people in the early Christian church, who told their story many times until John wrote it down. Even to this day, a place in Bethany, on the slope of the Mount of Olives, is revered by many Christians as Lazarus' tomb.

John wants us to know that a real man, called Lazarus, was brought back to life by Jesus. This would have seemed as incredible to ancient people as it does to us.

We are drawn through several separate, equally vivid scenes. In the first, Jesus heads for Lazarus' family home and, questioned by Martha, ends up in a tricky theological debate about resurrection (rising from the dead). It ends with the powerful statement from Jesus that he is not simply someone who *can* raise people from the dead, but is himself "the resurrection and the life."

In the second scene, Jesus gets close to their home in the village of Bethany and is questioned by the community there: why couldn't he have stopped Lazarus' death? And weeps there, he mourns with Lazarus' extended family. (Incidentally, when people say "Jesus wept", this is the passage they are likely unintentionally referring to!)

In the final scene, Jesus enters into a deep and powerful prayer to God, his Father, and calls the dead man Lazarus back to life.

Much to reflect on; so much wonder, so many mysteries, and so much light. Sometimes, only a piece of art can communicate fully the richness of a biblical passage. [Icon displays] I love icons, spiritual paintings from the Orthodox tradition of Christianity. This icon of the raising of Lazarus was painted some time in the twelfth century in Greece, around the time Solihull parish was founded.

The icon shows us how complex is Lazarus' story. We are given little snapshots of each episode. To the left, we see Jesus' interlocutors, questioning and debating: how is any of this possible, why has he chosen to work like this? To the right of the icon, we see the villagers wearing sad expressions, the people with whom Jesus cried. We see Lazarus himself, in the tomb, looking mournful yet expectant, bound in graveclothes. And in the centre is Jesus himself. One of his hands reaches out in love to Lazarus as if to say "come out, rise up!"; the other holds a scroll, containing, it is said, the names of those Jesus will raise from death to new life. And Mary and Martha, the women, kneel at his feet. Mary, dressed in burgundy, is eager with

longing – as if she is saying , “Jesus, please do this now!”; while Martha’s expression seems to represent her inquisitive mind.

All human life is represented in the icon, and in the story itself. [Icon fades] When faced with suffering and death, and the shadow they cast, we all react in different ways. We might wonder, with the questioners, what it is all about, perhaps even asking God “why couldn’t you act sooner, or differently?” We might be hopeful, expecting God to act, finding ourselves filled with an unexpected gift of trust. Or we might feel like weeping, either because we are overwhelmed, or in solidarity with the sick and dying, and those ministering to them.

At this time of crisis, you may be experiencing any combination of these reactions. I have found myself moving between anxiety, sorrow, and a sense of hope. We look at the sheer scale of the pandemic, the impact it is having on daily lives, the pressure which medics and carers are under, and we buckle under the weight of it all.

Yet in all of this, God is with us. In the story of Lazarus, Jesus meets everyone where they are. Jesus is happy to ponder mysteries of life and death with Martha and the religious experts, he is ready to meet Mary’s hopes for her brother, and he is also willing to simply weep, to suffer alongside those who mourn. In the figure of Lazarus, we even see the awesome presence of Jesus in the grave, His love made real for those who have died.

Perhaps you can see echoes of yourself, or the experiences of this past week, in this story. Where might Jesus be in your life, and in the struggles of our time?

As Christians, we believe in the God who has chosen, out of love for humanity, to be with us, suffer alongside us, bear our pains and troubles; to take our lot upon Him, to live, die and rise again for us. Like Jesus did for Lazarus, He will call us out of death into his new life, into resurrection hope. He will also meet us, call to us; weep and suffer with us, as he did on the Cross. In these testing times, may we know Jesus’ love more deeply, trust in his holy presence, and afterwards come to share in his glory.



The Prayers of Intercession

These and other prayers may be offered.

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

For those who are ill

Merciful God,
we entrust to your unfailing and tender care, those who are ill or in pain,
knowing that whenever danger threatens
your everlasting arms are there to hold us safe. Comfort and heal them,
and restore them to health and strength; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

For hospital staff and medical researchers

Gracious God,
give skill, sympathy and resilience
to all who are caring for the sick,
and your wisdom to those searching for a cure. Strengthen them with your Spirit,
that through their work many will be restored to health; through Jesus Christ our
Lord.
Amen.

From one who is ill or isolated

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayers for when you cannot get to church

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'. Be with me
today, as I offer myself to you.
Hear my prayers for others and for myself,
and keep me in your care.

Amen.

¶ *The Liturgy of the Sacrament*

The Peace

The Act of Spiritual Communion

Peace to this house from God our heavenly Father. Peace to this house from his Son who is our peace. Peace to this house from the Holy Spirit, the life-giver.

Silence is kept.

Almighty God,
in union with the faithful at every altar of your Church,
where your blessed body and blood are being offered to the Father, I desire to offer
you praise and thanksgiving.

I present to you my soul and body,
with the earnest wish that I may ever be united to you. And since I cannot now
receive you sacramentally,

I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.

I unite myself to you,
and embrace you with all the affections of my soul. Let nothing ever separate me
from you.

Let me live and die in your love.

Amen.

An anthem plays for contemplation.

Ex Ore Innocentium – John Ireland recorded by the St Alphege Girls' Choir

*It is a thing most wonderful,
Almost too wonderful to be.
That God's own Son should come from Heaven,
And die to save a child like me.
And yet I know that it is true :
He chose a poor and humble lot,
And wept, and toiled, and mourned, and died,
For love of those who loved him not.
I sometimes think about the Cross,
And shut my eyes, and try to see
The cruel nails and crown of thorns,
And Jesus, crucified for me.
But even could I see him die,
I should but see a little part
Of that great love, which, like a fire,
Is always burning in his heart.*

*And yet I want to love thee, Lord;
Oh light the flame within my heart,
And I will love thee more and more,
Until I see thee as thou art.*

¶ *The Dismissal*

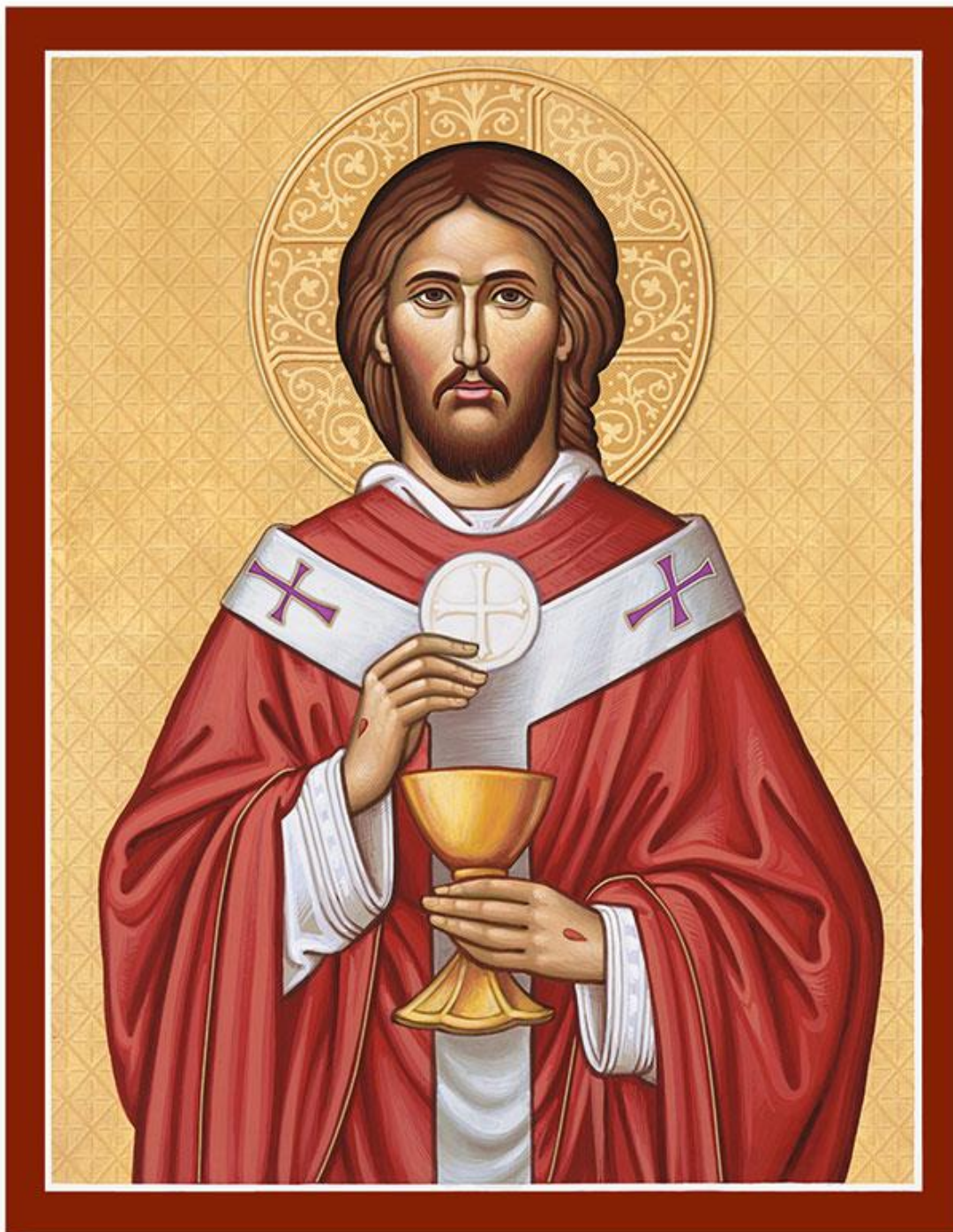
The Blessing

May God the holy and undivided Trinity preserve us in body, mind and spirit,
and bring us safe to that heavenly country where peace and harmony reign;

and may the blessing of God almighty,

+ the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always.

Amen.



Liturgy produced by the Society of Catholic Priests



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