



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

May 2020

My dear friends and colleagues,

This time of uncertainty, anxiety and tragedy has made me reflect that, like many of you, I have experienced God's healing in my own life and in the lives of many people over the decades that I've been in ministry. Anointing the sick and laying hands on those who have pain or incapacity is a great privilege for those who are in holy orders.

I do believe that God heals, but I also believe that healing is not always the only path that He chooses for us. Sometimes His plan for our lives does allow us to suffer and experience disease, illness, and hardship. The reason for this is that He can often teach us things through suffering that we would never be able to learn through a book or sermon, or in times of comfort and prosperity.



Paul had a problem with his eyesight that God never healed. When Timothy was sick, Paul told him to drink wine (not go to a healing service!). Lazarus, who was raised from the dead, eventually, of course, died. Paul says that he had a thorn in the flesh which he prayed for God to remove over and over again, but God never did remove it. Job suffered because God had a much bigger purpose for him than mere comfort on this planet. And Job's suffering was certainly not the result of a lack of faith.

Some of the greatest blessings in this world come from God's power in the midst of trials. God changes us, moulds us, strengthens us, and builds us through hardship. And the experience of being comforted by God when alone in that dark hour is very precious.

I have been in licenced ministry, lay and ordained, for more than fifty years, and during that time I have seen people deceived and hurt by those who falsely teach that God always wants to heal every malady or disorder. This is because that belief can cause a huge amount of guilt and disillusionment for the afflicted person in those times when God actually chooses not to heal. The implication, sometimes even an accusation, is that the suffering Christian just didn't quite believe enough or is hiding some sort of sin. I have seen Christians' faith destroyed by this confusion. And how often have we heard "If there were a God he wouldn't allow this to happen"?

We must realize that sometimes it just isn't God's plan to heal or to fix a problem quickly for us. But we needn't be downhearted about that. He still loves us. He still has a plan. And He still has a profound purpose for that pain that can end up blessing us beyond anything we could imagine.

Often God chooses to heal. But sometimes He teaches us more and draws us closer when we walk the dark mile of suffering. But to experience such blessing, it is important that we run to God and not away from Him in the midst of the storm.

I continue to pray that you will all remain safe and strong.

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Whitsuntide

Soon we will be celebrating the birth of the Christian Church through that great outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We must never forget that as for its birth, so for its revival and, indeed, its survival, the Spirit of the Lord is necessary to the Church. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is the Church. Where the Church is there is the Spirit of God,” wrote Saint Irenaeus.

I believe that God Himself has made us aware of the need and of the opportunities before us. I also believe we must make the best use of these or else we shall fade out. There can be no standing still. If it is true that God is calling you and me now to look to our membership of the Church then there can be only one answer – to obey that calling. The Church exists to share the life and the love of God and to bear witness to His truth and power. How? There is only one way. By obedience to His will. But is that the problem? I have read: “churches do not always conceive and organize their life as if this were true; their timidity and lack of confidence does not always suggest that their Gospel contains the Power of God.” (Contrariwise the utterly foolish actions taken by some churches during the Coronavirus pandemic, gathering crowds together, proclaiming with deluded bravado that they shall not be cowed, are to be condemned rather than praised.) But this doesn’t mean that organising is enough. There can be quite a lot of feverish activity of a sort and a great deal of talk about what we ought to do. We have been reminded that the Church is an organism and not an organisation. It is a living thing. There must be life – spiritual life, and it is the Spirit of God which gives life to the Church. All our efforts will produce nothing without the Holy Spirit. The Psalmist said “Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it” (27:1). The same thought is expressed in a slightly different way in St John’s Gospel 15:5, “I am the Vine; ye are the branches... Without me ye can do nothing.”

But, having said this about the spiritual life, we mustn’t think then that being spiritually alive means to be impractical. A spiritually alive church is a practising church, alive to its responsibilities, its members all joining in its worship and also its work. This is not an optional matter. God will judge us on this. We are already being judged. The people who get the most out of life are those who put most into it. If, as some people say, they get nothing out of going to church, may it not be that this is because they put too little in? How much happiness and satisfaction are we missing out on because we don’t give God what we owe Him? “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

And what impression do we make upon the non-believer because of what he sees, or doesn’t see, in us? The way to revival lies in our corporate waiting upon God and then acting. We have been called. Let us be filled with the fire of the Holy Ghost and obey that calling.



The purpose of life is to glorify God
in both good and hard times alike.

— T. B. Joshua —

(For variety I will often use as a “desk picture” some Isle of Sheppey scenes viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it!)