

Pastoral Letter – May 2020

From The Rev'd Paula Griffiths

Dear friends,

Last summer I picked up at the Hadstock Fete (do you remember those happy social activities ...?) Terry Waite's account of his captivity in Beirut – Taken on Trust. I started reading it this February. With coronavirus spreading, it felt increasingly resonant with our present situation.



His gruelling experience eclipsed any frustration we may feel about lockdown. For much of his nearly four years' imprisonment he was completely isolated; often chained to the wall; could leave his room only for a daily visit to the bathroom: never saw even his captors, because he had to be blindfolded whenever they entered the room; could not even see outside, because the window was covered with metal sheeting.

How did he keep sane? Eventually, they brought him books, one at a time –anything from a child's story book; a Mills and Boon romance; a volume of an encyclopaedia; or Dostoevsky. He begged for a Bible and Prayer Book: and eventually received them.

He developed a daily structure: morning prayers; exercise, when he wasn't chained, pacing round the small room; reading; then composing in his head the book which he wrote after his release.

He clung to the person and teachings of Jesus. Often he prayed through Holy Communion from memory: one Christmas Eve, he saved a scrap of bread and a drop of water in his plastic beaker for his own Midnight Mass.

In these strange days, we, like him, feel anxious for ourselves and our families; we too are cut off from meeting in church. Even if (a huge if, as I write) March's tight restrictions have been relaxed by the time you read this, life may not be normal for some time. But we are learning to worship together as a Christian community while physically separated. Our own prayers and Bible reading unite us in faith and hope. Praying at different times, using different words, we form part of the Church's great voice of prayer all round the world, which is never silent.

Technology helps us worship in new ways: emails, St Mary's website, Zoom packages, and written resources. I'm deeply grateful to our technical and musical experts supporting these packages, to yourselves embracing new ideas so positively, and to the many volunteers providing pastoral and practical support.

We are blessed to join in this way as the body of Christ, sharing his love in this troubled world. Sharing the Eucharist from my home through Zoom is a special privilege for me: and I, and my ministerial colleagues, are at the end of a phone, always ready to talk.

This month we celebrate Christ's ascension to heaven as Lord and King, and the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost to guide and sustain us. May the knowledge that we on earth are only

part of the eternal company of God's people give us strength to stand together, confident that, whatever befalls us, nothing can separate us from his love and care.

With my prayers and love to you all,

Paula

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