

**Tuesday 26th May 2020**

*“You stir humanity to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”*

*Augustine of Hippo*

Dear Friends

The reason for the quote from Augustine is that I am writing this on the day the Church commemorates the very first Archbishop of Canterbury. The quote above is probably amongst his most well-known. Other sayings from Augustine include:

“True martyrdom is not determined by the penalty suffered, but by the cause”

“to many, total abstinence is easier than perfect moderation”

“poetry is devil’s wine”

“Rome has spoken, the case is concluded”

All of which is proof that one can admire some of the words of great people without having to admire them all. I wonder what Augustine would have made of TS Eliot for instance, or for that matter, of the Reformation?

Opinions matter; problems arise however, when we move too swiftly from expressing an opinion to coming to a conclusion; and especially so when we’ve reached a conclusion before formulating an opinion! Wisdom takes time.

One area over which we need wisdom, is discerning what the church – and I’m thinking of us locally here – can learn from the COVID-19 experience. To this end, I have compiled a questionnaire which will be issued on or soon after the 1 June. The questionnaire is in two parts. The first part - Church Life and Community Witness – asks you to identify what has been lost and gained in church life these past few months, what must be recovered and what may be let go for ever. The second section – Worship and Communication – asks you to reflect on those innovations that have become part of our life these past weeks. What should stay, what should go – and most important of all: why?

The questionnaire will be issued by email and by hand. It is very important that everyone thinks seriously about contributing as the Church Councils will be using the results to plan the future. Although the questionnaire was devised by me for All Saints and St Godwald’s, variants of it will be distributed to the other churches in the team too.

It’s important not to rush your replies but I would like to have received all replies please by 30 June. They can be returned to me by email or dropped into the vicarage letter box. It is up to you whether to add your names or not, but it might be helpful if you can identify which congregation you are from (e.g. 8am All Saints).

Last Sunday afternoon I conducted my first wedding by Archbishops’ Special Licence for a couple, one of whom is receiving end of life care in Bromsgrove. The legal preparations were extensive, complicated and time-consuming. The ceremony itself was conducted in masks and visors and completed as swiftly as legally possible for the benefit of the groom. It would have been a very special occasion in ordinary circumstances; during COVID-19 it transformed a special day into a very real privilege. One of many reflections for me from that half hour, was a much deeper respect for all our NHS staff currently caring for others whilst dressed in full PPE. This Thursday is widely expected to be the final ‘clap’ for our carers – at least that is the request from the author of the idea. I will be ringing St Godwald’s bell louder and longer than ever.

Like many of you, I am unsure of the wisdom of opening up our schools and the economy next week to the extent that is planned. Whether you respond enthusiastically or hesitatingly, please continue to take care, looking out for neighbours and one another. Above all else, remember that the narrative of God’s presence in the world is far stronger than the virus and, as we shall celebrate this Sunday, His Spirit is always with us. However lonely and isolated we feel, we only have to open our hearts to God to sense the warmth of his encouragement and hope.

Take care:

This comes with my continuing love and prayers,

David Ford, Rector

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