

Why Cannot We Go Back to St Aidan's Now? – The Final Chapter!

I know I don't have to repeat this for the sake of those who understand and appreciate my position, but I am doing this just once more in case some of you are still wondering about it all and are either confused or upset. It is understandable. I share the same feelings of sadness myself, but we must be strong and patient.

So In conclusion on this issue (I shall not be saying it again!)

What really is the point of opening the building for at most 20 people (14 on a rota basis plus 2 clergy, 1 server, 1 choir person and 2 stewards) when the rest of the community cannot attend?

Would you be willing and able to turn someone away who arrived as a new person just because the church was full? (i.e., 20 people inside). That is exactly what would have to happen.

If we opened church for Liturgy, we would NOT be able to give people Holy Communion by instruction of the Bishop. Presently, you can all receive Holy Communion at home. Why would you come to a re-opened church building if you could NOT receive Holy Communion?

The BISHOP has decided (wisely in my view) that although you cannot get the virus from the Holy Gifts, they cannot be safely administered using a shared spoon from a 1 metre distance.

Although the Government Guidance does allow the priest to approach closer than one metre but only wearing a mask, very briefly and without ANY physical contact, that does not help us.

The Government Guidance says about this that "food items" may only be DROPPED onto the hand. This is not a huge problem for the Body of Christ, but it would be (clearly) for the Blood of Christ.

The only way to administer the Blood of Christ in these circumstances would be by not touching anyone's mouth, or tongue or lips with the spoon. If the spoon did touch skin, (highly likely considering the behaviour of infants and adult engrained behaviours), then everything would have to stop while the spoon was sanitised.

Banned! ... no kissing of icons, relics, cross or any other object in church; no kissing of the priest's hand; no embracing of one another in keeping one metre with masks or two metres without masks; no touching of church furniture including door handles; no opening of toilets without cleaning after every visit; no Children's Corner / shared toys; no food or drink; no congregational singing apart from one person in the choir vocalising quietly into a radio microphone behind a plastic screen; no possibility of the priest praying with the Gifts uncovered the list goes on and on! Moreover, everyone charged with maintaining good

order, (stewards, clergy, servers) would be continually distracted by all these things. How can any semblance of Orthodox worship take place in these circumstances? I am simply not prepared to accept these restrictions.

Of course, some may say ... then break the hygiene regulations if you can't accept them for worship. Let's all go back now and act normally. God will protect us.

No. 1 ... you would be either breaking the law or compromising best practice.

No. 2 ... you would be disobeying the Bishop.

Need I also remind you that viruses do not choose whom they will infect? The Church BUILDING is not a virus free zone. Remember that Christ was Himself tempted by the devil to jump off the Temple Mount on the grounds that the Father would save Him. Please do not fall into the same trap that Our Lord avoided. The devil too can quote Scripture [*Matthew 4:5-7, compare Psalm 90(91)*].

Quite aside from the fact that the authorities would shut us down by court order if we disobeyed the regulations, what would be the sense in that?! You, as an individual may decide to accept significant risks, but you have no right whatsoever to put someone else in danger by your choices and actions. I know that is a very blunt way of putting it but it's the truth. As citizens we do not just have rights and freedoms; we also have social obligations and a duty of care for each other.

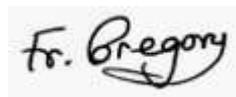
As your priest I also have a responsibility before God to keep you all safe BOTH physically AND spiritually. We are not like the heretical gnostics who thought that physical concerns were inferior to those of the spirit.

That is why I not only took care of you physically by shutting the building in a timely manner. I also took care of you spiritually by taking a huge risk in making sure that you continued to receive Holy Communion at home. The practice was commended by St Basil and since then has been blessed by our Bishop. I knew that we would be away from the temple for a long time: a time that has by no means yet ended. (With the local outbreaks resurging again across the country we are arguably facing the second wave already).

So, we will be going back to church when we can have a normal church life. Faith enlivens us, hope sustains us and (the greatest of gifts), love, binds us to God and one another even when we cannot be physically present to each other, (1 Corinthians 13).

Our hope, of course, is in Christ alone, Christ that is working through dedicated human beings like you and I to help bring this pandemic under control - if not to an end.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr. Gregory

2nd July 2020