

From the Bishop of Richborough Easter 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

As you know the Chrism Masses have had to be postponed and we are unable to gather together for the renewal of our Christian commitment and the blessing of the oils. For all of us this is very disorientating and disappointing and something none of us could have planned for. As it happens, for this year I'd ordered luminous green Richborough Family wrist bands and new glossy service booklets which will now have to wait till we have the all clear to gather again for worship!

The impact on our lives has still to be measured and we all have a long way to go. Like you I am finding the shut down difficult and I am really missing the privilege of our times together as the Richborough Family. But there is also a lot to encourage and sustain us till life returns to relative normality, not least the broadcast of Her Majesty the Queen in response to the current outbreak. I have watched it several times, and for me at least, those five hundred and twenty two words have proved a helpful template in navigating a way through this complex and uncertain time.

Recent advances in communication have certainly come into their own during the lockdown and apart from television and the radio, many of us are using our phones and computers to keep abreast of the news and to keep in touch with one another. Who would have thought that so many of us would now be proficient in skype, zoom and streaming! The downside to this, of course, is that while those less familiar with modern technology feel a bit left out, others are suffering from information overload. Thankfully, what has certainly come back into fashion is the telephone and I've enjoyed chatting and catching up with friends and colleagues for longer than I'd normally have time for. I've even phoned a few people to see how they are that have long been relegated to the annual Christmas card.

This Lent and Holy Week it has also been inspiring and humbling to hear about the ways our clergy and lay folk have risen with imagination and ingenuity to the challenge of maintaining and sharing prayer and worship. This year our walk with Our Lord to the Cross has had a particular poignancy, as we recall his final journey to Jerusalem, vulnerable and afraid of what lay ahead.

I think we are all rediscovering that it is in the simple things, the kindly word, the offers of help and the holding one another in prayer, that we best and most naturally live out our faith. And I hope that when this crisis is over, rather than immediately engaging in frenetic activity, we all take time to savour and appreciate the privilege of worship, the sacramental life and fellowship one with another.

It is a truism to say that the landscape will have changed. The landscape is always changing, and the pandemic will inevitably take its toll. Economically we may be weaker but as a society we may well be stronger. From the clapping in our streets on Thursday evenings and recognising the need for neighbourly care, to breathing space for the environment and in a greater understanding of the implications of globalisation, hopefully lessons will be learned.

Towards the end of her address to the nation, Queen Elizabeth summed up her message with these words.

*'This is a time we join with all nations across the globe in a common endeavour,
using the great advances of science and our instinctive compassion to heal.*

We will succeed- and that success will belong to every one of us'.

'We will be with our friends again. We will be with our families again. We will meet again'.

Perhaps it was only me, but while the commentators were suggesting echoes of Vera Lynn and the wartime spirit as the Queen ended the broadcast, I heard in her words the testimony of a life long committed Christian, offering to us a strong and powerful proclamation of the Resurrection.

Three times Her Majesty said 'again', confidently and with conviction, in the knowledge that in Christ both here and in heaven we will always be with our friends, we will always be with our families and most certainly we will meet again.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

With Easter Blessings,

+ Norman
Richborough