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Monday of Fifth Week of Easter 2020

Dear Friends

Christ Is Risen! Alleluia!

Following the Prime Minister's words last night, I thought we may have a better idea of what the future might hold for churches, but clearly this is not the case. We are no further forward as to when and how the Church might come out of lockdown. I have been receiving emails from parents wanting to book Baptisms which is an incredibly good sign, but I don't have a clue as to when these might be able to be booked. Also, from a parent looking for First Holy Communion next year and asking about dates. Sadly, I still don't have a date for this year's First Holy Communion! But I hope this may be remedied soon.

It is sad looking at the diary for all the wonderful events that we have had to postpone over the past few weeks. Baptism and Reception into Full Communion at the Easter Vigil, First Reconciliation and Holy Communion, a Wedding, Confirmation with the Bishop's Visitation. These events are postponed and not cancelled, but their postponement is still very painful for those involved. As Her Majesty the Queen reminded us this will end, and we will be together again. We will celebrate happy times again.

In the meantime, we must carry on as best we can. A few of my clergy friends have been discussing how the Church will fare following the easing of the lockdown and what the Church will look like in the 'new normal'. Some are talking in terms of a great revival in Church attendance, based on the premise that so many people have been accessing Mass and 'Googling' the word prayer so much that many will want to come and see it in the flesh. Others are talking about a further slump in attendance

as people realise that they haven't really missed attending Mass on a Sunday. I have no idea what the Church will look like in a years' time or a few months' time for that matter, I must have mislaid my crystal ball, but what I can say is that I dislike this term 'a new normal' because what we are enduring is in no way normal. It may be necessary for a while but this has to end sometime. And when the Bishops give us permission, I hope that we can be ready.

My reading this week comes from Professor Stephen Bullivant, Professor of Theology and the Sociology of Religion, and Director of the Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society at St Mary's University, Twickenham. He has written the book: *Catholicism in the time of Coronavirus*, penned in the period of ten days at the start of the lockdown. He discusses the current status of the Church in America and in the UK. It is available as a free download here: <https://www.wordonfire.org/covid/> and makes for interesting reading. Some of what he writes makes uncomfortable reading, in particular he highlights the difficult decisions that Bishops will be making in the coming weeks and months, if nothing else, it should make us pray all the harder for our Bishops – especially Bishop Alan, and their deliberations.

Do please continue to pray for each other, be assured of my prayers for all of you, and please pray for me and for Deacon Des too.

With my love and blessing

Fr Lee