

Virtual or real?

During the present lockdown we have been unable to meet our friends and family and many of us have been discovering new and imaginative ways of keeping close. The one thing that lasts for ever is love. This is the ultimate reality and we should thank God for the resources of modern technology that have enabled us to express our love, albeit at a distance. At the same time, we know that “virtual” is not the same as physical contact. We long to be able to be together again. There is something of a paradox here. We know that love, the nature of God himself, transcends all the limitations of time and space and does not need physical expression. And yet in this life physical, personal, face to face contact is a necessary part of showing our love for each other. The present gradual lifting of some of the lockdown restrictions means that we are now beginning to be able to rejoice not only in the love we know we have for each other but also “by baby steps” to express it by occasional and “socially distanced” meeting.

I think this tells us something important about our life as Christians, members of the Body of Christ. One of the wonderful things about our faith is its very physical, human and earthly quality. We know that God is greater than anything he has created; we know that in his love all the limitations of our earthly existence (including sin and death) are overcome. And yet while we live this present life we need physical, practical expressions of his presence with us. This is why however wonderful our ability to worship “virtually” - whether by our online pilgrimage or the regular streamed services from St Faith’s - we long for something more. Just as we yearn to hug our friends again, we also need to receive Christ’s body and blood sacramentally as well as “virtually” or “spiritually”.

For the meantime, let us do the best we can, confident that our love for each other and God’s love for us do not depend on physical contact. But let us also remember that we are not bodiless angels, but flesh and blood human beings. Our human desire to be able to meet again echoes our spiritual desire to enjoy the fullness of our sacramental life just as soon as we can.