

Reflections on Christian Communion in a Time of Physical Distancing and COVID-19

Reflections offered by members of the CEC Thematic Group on Science, New Technologies and Christian Ethics in view of the Easter celebrations in our Churches amidst COVID-19 crisis.

Exceptional situation

This is an extraordinary situation that calls into question a number of formerly unquestioned beliefs. While being extreme, this situation will not endure forever. Therefore, we should not succumb to fear and panic. We have to cope with this extreme situation with reason and with trust in the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul says: ***For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but one of power, love, and self-discipline.***

Comfort and support

We are called to be spiritually one, as Jesus and the Father are one. We are brothers and sisters by virtue of confessing our common faith in Jesus Christ. Being one fills us with the longing to comfort and support each other, to worship together, to share in Holy Communion.

All people are suffering from the physical isolation and the need to keep their distance from others, from their loved ones. We are called upon to surrender some of our liberty and to absent ourselves from our places of work. Others are more than ever called upon to work tirelessly. Giving attention and listening to others is more important than it ever was.

In this time people need above all comfort and spiritual guidance. This is what we as Christians are charged with; we are called to bring peace. As Christians, we are united all over the world through prayer and worship.

As the prophet Isaiah proclaimed: ***"Comfort! Yes, comfort my people," says your God.***

Worship is still possible

It is important to note that during the time of the pandemic worship itself can still take place albeit in a different form. There is worship that physically gathers together the believers within a household or a small group, a family or a monastery. For some Christians the isolation, as we will see, brings great suffering. It can however be lived

in this very particular and unusual situation as “spiritual solidarity” with all those who are ill, who have lost their loved ones and cannot attend their funerals, who no longer have employment and who feel themselves totally adrift in the current dramatic situation. Gathering is also possible in a digital space, when you can see and hear your brothers and sisters. As Jesus says in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew 18,20: ***Where two or three have come together in my name, I am there among them.***

Digital worship and Holy Communion

Exceptional situations demand exceptional faith in the power and presence of the living God. Physical distance does not mean social distance. In a mysterious manner, we are all connected through the spirit of God.

For some traditions, this can be an opportunity to find new forms of celebrating the Eucharist through digital communication.

Others suffer because in their tradition it is unthinkable to celebrate and share Holy Communion except in a physical gathering of the faithful. While remaining true to their centuries-old practice, this extraordinary time can also be experienced as a call for inspired creativity.

We include in our prayer all of our brothers and sisters who are suffering spiritually from this situation, especially when it comes to celebrating Holy Communion.

In this exceptional situation we believe in God's promise of His comforting presence.

As Jesus says in the Gospel according to Saint John:

The wind blows where it wants to. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. That's the way it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

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