

# An Act of Spiritual Communion

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**A resource for Christians in the Anglican Tradition  
who are prevented from gathering for the Eucharist.**

*For guidance in using this service, please read the Notes which follow the service.*

*For a discussion of the theology of this service, please see the section 'Theological Guidance'  
which follow the Notes.*

## The Preparation

As the deer longs for the water brooks,  
so longs my soul for you, O God.  
My soul is athirst for God, even for the living God;  
when shall I come before the presence of God?

*(Psalm 42:1, 2)*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### *Confession and Words of Comfort*

If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves  
and the truth is not in us;  
If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just  
will forgive us our sins  
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

*(1 John 1: 8, 9)*

*A period of silent recollection follows.*

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,  
we have sinned against you  
and against our neighbour  
in thought and word and deed,  
through negligence, through weakness,  
through our own deliberate fault.

We are truly sorry  
and repent of all our sins.  
For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who died for us,  
forgive us all that is past  
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life  
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Hear the words of comfort, our Saviour Christ says  
to all who truly turn to him:

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden,  
and I will give you rest.

God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in him should not perish  
but have everlasting life.

*A Collect may follow, either the Collect of the Day, or the following*

Almighty and everlasting God,  
You are always more ready to hear than we to pray  
and to give more than either we desire or deserve:  
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,  
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid  
and giving us those good things  
    which we are not worthy to ask  
but through the merits and mediation  
of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

## **The Word of God**

*A reading may follow from the Old Testament, or the Acts/Epistles (or both).*

*A reading may follow from the Book of Psalms.*

*A reading from one of the Gospels is read. (Either that apportioned for the Day, or the previous Sunday, or one of the gospel readings located in the section at the end.)*

*The reading ends with the words*

This is the Gospel of the Lord  
thanks be to God.

*The Apostles Creed may be said*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Prayers of Intercession*

In the power of the Spirit, and in union with Christ, hear our prayer O heavenly Father ...

*Either silently, or aloud, pray for...*

- *The world, its people and those with responsibility for the health and welfare of others*
- *The Church, our witness and those who bear different responsibilities*
- *Those whom you know who are suffering in any way (physical, emotional, psychological)*
- *Commend to God those who have died, and pray for those who are bereaved*
- *Pray for yourselves, your cares and your needs*

*The prayers end by saying*

Merciful Father  
accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Spiritual Communion**

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the grave, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

*Psalm 139: 7-10*

Jesus says,  
Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;  
if you hear my voice and open the door,  
I will come in to you and eat with you,  
and you with me.

*Revelation 3:20*

Lord our God  
you prepare a table before us  
and, although we cannot be present at your Holy Eucharist,  
by your grace, open our hearts to receive  
the gift of your Son, the Word made flesh:

who, on the night that he was betrayed  
took bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying  
take, eat, this is my body which is given for you,  
do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way after supper, he took the cup  
he gave it to them saying,  
drink this all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant  
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins,  
do this in remembrance of me.

Send your Holy Spirit upon us  
that, though separated by distance,  
we may still, through faith, be partakers in the benefits  
of Christ's offering of his body and his blood.

This we ask, through the same Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

*The following prayer may be said*

Most merciful Lord,  
your love compels us to come in.  
Our hands were unclean,  
our hearts were unprepared;  
we were not fit  
even to eat the crumbs from under your table.  
But you, Lord, are the God of our salvation,  
and share your bread with sinners.  
So cleanse and feed us  
with the precious body and blood of your Son,  
that he may live in us and we in him;  
and that we, with the whole company of Christ,  
may sit and eat in your kingdom. Amen.

*A time of silence follows, as each person present makes their own spiritual communion with God.*

*The period of spiritual communion concludes by saying*

As Jesus has taught us, so we say with confidence:

Our Father, who art in heaven  
hallowed be thy name  
thy kingdom come  
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;  
give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

*The following prayer may also be said*

Father of all,  
we give you thanks and praise,  
that when we were still far off  
you met us in your Son and brought us home.  
Dying and living, he declared your love,  
gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.  
May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;  
we who drink his cup bring life to others;

we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.  
Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,  
so we and all your children shall be free,  
and the whole earth live to praise your name;  
through Christ our Lord,  
Amen.

## Conclusion

'Remember, I am with you  
to the end of the age,' says the Lord.

*(Matthew 28:20)*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
and the love of God  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all, evermore. Amen.

We go in the peace of Christ  
Thanks be to God.

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## Notes: how to use this service

1. The service is designed to be used easily by one person. If there is more than one person participating, either everyone present may join in with all the words, or the words may be divided up into different sections. If so, it is wise to work out before starting, who is doing what.
  2. In addition to this service outline, you will need a Bible. You should turn up least a Gospel reading to be used during the service. A series of suggested Gospel passages follows. Alternatively, you can use the Sunday readings from your church's website.
  3. Consider how you have set up your space: check you are going to be free from interruptions. You may wish to light a candle, if it is safe to do so. Some may wish to play some music before the service and at the end. Take time to be quiet before you begin and read the service in an unhurried way.
  4. The sections in italics are rubrics: these explain what needs to happen at various points.
  5. Intercessions: these are not specified – you may wish to pray them silently or aloud, whichever feels most engaging for you.
  6. Spiritual communion: involves using your imagination. Imagine yourself taking the bread and drinking the wine at communion. As you do, express, in your heart, your desire to be united with Christ through his sacrament. Don't rush this moment as it is the highlight of the service.
  7. Give yourself some time for silent prayer at the end.
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## Table of Gospel Readings

Week commencing	Sunday of Church Year	Gospel Passage	Summary
29 March 2020	Lent 5 (Passion Sunday)	John 11: 1-45	The raising of Lazarus
5 April 2020	Palm Sunday	Matt 21:1-11 or Matt 27:11-54	Triumphal Entry or Passion according to Matthew
	Maundy Thursday	John 13: 1-17	Jesus washes the disciples' feet
	Good Friday	John 18:1-19:end	Passion according to John
12 April 2020	Easter Day (Easter 1)	Matthew 28:1-10 or John 20:1-18	Mary Magdalen goes to the Tomb  The empty tomb
19 April 2020	Easter 2	John 20:19-end	Thomas meets the risen Jesus

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## Spiritual Communion: a brief theological introduction

The term 'spiritual communion' has come to the fore in the current Covid-19 epidemic. Before this, if it was known about at all, it was a practice associated with Catholic spirituality within Anglicanism, and has not been widely practised since the Second World War. Guidance, or services, for receiving spiritual communion tended to be somewhat dated in their language and outlook, reflecting 19<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic devotion.

The term and practice first came into use following the writing of St Thomas Aquinas who – after St Augustine before him – made a distinction between inward and outward reception of a sacrament.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Holy Communion, Aquinas pointed out that it was possible for a person to outwardly receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, but not inwardly receive God's accompanying sacramental grace – due to a lack of penitence and faith. Likewise, he argued, it was also possible to receive the *inward grace* associated with Holy Communion, when receiving the *outward form* was impossible. Aquinas argues this with reference to those who received the *grace* of baptism, being desirous of it, but unable to physically receive it. The same, he argues, is the case with communion.

Within Anglicanism, the *Book of Common Prayer* retained this belief that it was possible to receive the grace of communion even when it was impossible to receive the sacrament itself. Cranmer included the doctrine in a rubric in the Order for *The Communion of the Sick* which was retained in all future editions of the BCP, up to and including 1662.

But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for want of warning in due time to the Curate, or for lack of company to receive with him, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood: the Curate shall instruct him that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and stedfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he that thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefore; he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's healthy, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth.<sup>2</sup>

In both Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, Spiritual Communion is not the *normative* way of receiving communion – which is to receive the sacrament with God's people when they are gathered for that purpose. However, it is a valid means of receiving the *grace* of the sacrament, in special circumstances, when gathering for communion is rendered impossible, and where the believer is desirous to partake of it.

The Order provided in this text draws on the Anglican tradition for its inspiration, and this is reflected in the choice of words for the prayers, and particularly in the use of scripture within the service provided.

Many of the prayers are drawn from *Common Worship, Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, which material is copyright © The Archbishops Council, 2000 and published by Church House Publishing. Ministers from other Anglican provinces may wish to amend this service to

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theologiae* III q 80.1

<sup>2</sup> BCP 1662, *The Communion of the Sick* Cambridge University Press, Standard Edition, 2004. p.325

reflect their own provinces' authorised liturgies. The Bible quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*. It has been compiled by Paul Roberts.