

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION



A liturgy for Christians who are prevented from
gathering for the Eucharist

Spiritual Communion: An 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 19th 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. 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 steadfastly 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.

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.

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An Act of Spiritual Communion

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

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?

Psalms 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.

Matthew 11.28

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

John 3.16

*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

Hear the Gospel of our Lord according to Mark.
Praise to you O Christ.

12 28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; 33 and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

The reading ends with the words

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

THE SERMON

INTERCESSIONS

Let us pray to the Lord,
who is our refuge and stronghold.

For the health and well-being of our nation,
that all who are fearful and anxious
may be at peace and free from worry:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For the isolated and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs,
and care for them in their vulnerability:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For our homes and families,
our schools and young people,
and all in any kind of need or distress:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.
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.

Psalms 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.

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. 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.
 3. The sections in *red italics* are rubrics: these explain what needs to happen at various points.
 4. 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.
 5. Give yourself some time for silent prayer at the end.
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