

Notes

TERRY BROWN

I guess my starting point is that God's grace is bountiful beyond our understanding, so that if for some reason (pandemic, isolation, abuse by the presider, etc.) one cannot receive the Eucharist, God's grace is still there, including sacramental (sacramental understood very broadly as in the Vatican 2 documents) grace. Therefore, I do not have much sympathy for constructing a kind of pseudo-sacrament that one does on one's own without a community present. I think it is good enough to reflect on the scriptures of the day, pray, and offer oneself to God. Nor do I see much need for electronic consecration from afar. (An old Presbyterian friend in the US wrote me about their putting the elements on the coffee table on a Sunday morning and having them consecrated by the pastor on the computer screen. Fine if your sacramental theology is only memorialist, but why does one even need a clergy person then?)

Nor do I find it problematic that during the pandemic, some closed communities (for example, monastic groups) have been able carefully to continue with the sacrament, presiding and receiving on behalf of the whole church. Therefore, I think I would have preferred Bishops to continue a small Eucharistic celebration (weekly or even daily) in the cathedral or chapel, even with a very small congregation (even if only one), done on behalf of the whole church. I believe that was what was done widely in the Scottish Episcopal Church; and, of course, there was the example of Pope Francis and the Triduum. Therefore, I had my doubts about the "Eucharist Fast" theology. I do not think doing something out of necessity necessarily makes it a virtue. However, I am faraway and I do not want to judge a context of which I am not a part. (With the SSF Friars here, we have had no break in our daily-except-Saturday Eucharist since I arrived on 29 February. But at most there have only been four of us, much hand sanitizer and distancing, I have even changed how I preside, much less touching of the elements, communion in one kind, behind locked doors, visitors not welcome, etc.)

Bishop Wood's Melanesian Mission service of spiritual communion is interesting, though I am not sure it was used. The booklet was not reprinted. I think it must have been primarily for lay staff, including women missionaries, who had no access to a priest. People did regularly receive communion before being confirmed once they were taught and deemed to be "desirous" of receiving HC, as episcopal visits might be very rare.

It seems to me another option for families, as even in a pandemic families do gather to eat together, would be some sort of agape meal commemoration, presided over by a member of the family. Of course, it would be grace-filled, and eucharistic, even if not the Eucharist.